

## ABSTRACT

### RECONCILING REASON AND REVELATION IN THE WRITINGS OF IBN TAYMIYYA (d. 728/1328): An Analytical Study of Ibn Taymiyya's *Dar' al-ta'āruḍ*

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This dissertation deals with the Damascene Ḥanbalite theologian, Ahmad b. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm b. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Ḥarrānī, commonly known as Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), and his attempt to reconcile the human faculty of reason with the Divine Text of the Qur’ān and the ḥadīth traditions of the Prophet through his ten-volume work, *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* ('Averting the Conflict of Reason with Revelation'). The work was written as a response to another work, entitled *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs*, authored by the Ash‘arī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210).

This dissertation consists of three chapters. The first chapter lays out the context for understanding the phenomenon of the *Dar'*. To this end, it begins with a detailed foray into the development and rise of the Ash‘arī school, from its inception in the fourth Islamic/tenth Gregorian century at the hands of its eponymous founder Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935), working its way through al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and culminating, for the purposes of this dissertation, with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Special attention is paid in attempting to understand *why* this school quickly gained such prominence. Al-Rāzī's life and his *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* is then discussed, and his 'Universal Principle', which is the claim that intellectual proofs trump religious texts in the case of conflict, is examined, with a survey of its historical development during the previous three centuries. The chapter concludes with a summary of the life and works of Ibn Taymiyya, drawn from the primary sources. The name, date of writing, and printings of the *Dar'* are also discussed, along with a brief comparison of the *Dar'* with other works that Ibn Taymiyya wrote, such as his *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya* ('The Elucidation of the Deception of the Jahmīs').

The second chapter begins by summarizing the ten-volume *Dar'* in two manners. Firstly, a sequential summary of the work is offered, in the order that Ibn Taymiyya wrote it; and, secondly, a holistic categorization of the techniques, motifs, specific refutations and methods that Ibn Taymiyya used to refute the ‘Universal Principle’ are given. The latter part of this chapter deals with extracting Ibn Taymiyya’s conception and definition of both ‘*aql* (reason) and ‘*naql* (Revelation), and attempting to formulate his version of a working relationship between these two concepts. This chapter is concluded by proposing a ‘Taymiyyan’ equivalent of the ‘Universal Principal’.

The third and final chapter analyzes Ibn Taymiyya’s criticisms of the *kalām* proofs for God’s existence, and extrapolates Ibn Taymiyya’s definition, usage and epistemological role that he gave to the human *fitra*. To this end, the historical understanding of the *fitra* by Muslim theologians before Ibn Taymiyya is examined, both from a Ḥanbalī and an Ash‘arī perspective. Then, Ibn Taymiyya’s unique contributions to this notion are analyzed, and his attempt at using it as a means of validating both the truth of the Qur’ān and correct reason discussed. By way of example of what the differing views of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Rāzī entail, the Qur’ānic story of Abraham’s search for God via an examination the celestial objects is contrasted between the interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya and the interpretation of al-Rāzī. The chapter concludes by proposing a relationship between the *fitra*, human intellect, and Qur’ānic Scripture.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, the primary findings of this research are highlighted, and further areas of research suggested. The dissertation ends with a complete bibliography of works cited.

RECONCILING REASON AND REVELATION IN THE  
WRITINGS OF IBN TAYMIYYA (d. 728/1328)

An Analytical Study of Ibn Taymiyya's *Dar' al-ta'āruḍ*

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*“And He has bestowed upon you all that you asked for;*

*And were you to count the blessings of Allah,  
you would not be able to list them...”*

Q. 14:34

*For Ammi and Abbi*

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*Alḥamdu lillāh wāḥda wa-l-ṣalāt wa-l-ṣalām ‘alā man la nabiyya bā’da...*

A work of this size and duration cannot be completed through the sole effort of one person. There are many to acknowledge, and as the saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad goes, “He who does not thank the people does not thank God!”<sup>1</sup>

First and foremost I must offer my heartfelt and sincere gratitude to my advisor and dissertation director, Professor Gerhard Böwering. When I applied to select graduate programs across the world, and corresponded with many professors, I sensed in Professor Böwering a genuine interest and concern in my future studies, and a desire to take me beyond my seminary-style education. My somewhat atypical background, having studied for ten years at the Islamic University of Medina, might have proven challenging for some potential advisors, but Professor Böwering was eager to have a student with my training be admitted into the program at Yale. And I can truly say that I could not have asked for a better *Doktorvater* to introduce me to the academic study of Islam in the Western world. I shall forever be grateful for the trust that he placed in me, and I hope that I have lived up to his expectations.

To Professor Frank Griffel, I am indebted for the hundreds of hours of discussion and training that he gave me. His was the first class that I took at Yale, and it opened up a whole new methodological paradigm: one that shaped me and honed my own skills. I

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<sup>1</sup>Narrated from Abū Hurayra, as reported in the *Kitāb al-sunan* of Abū Dawūd Sulaymān b. al-Ash’ath al-Sijistānī (d. 275/888), *The Book of Manners*, Chapter: Regarding Giving Thanks In Return for a Favor (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 253, hadīth 4811.

learnt just as much from him outside the classroom as I did inside. His interest in early Islamic theology and the development of *kalām* mirrors my own – there are probably only a handful of people in the world with whom one can heatedly debate thousand-year old Naysāpūrian religious controversies, and be so engrossed in that discussion that an entire afternoon goes by in the twinkling of an eye (or perhaps more like an ‘*arad* that does not last two consecutive time-frames!)

My many teachers and mentors during my decade-long immersion at the University of Medina deserve much gratitude for all the knowledge and mannerisms that they passed on to me. In particular, I must mention Professor Muḥammad b. Khalīfa al-Tamīmī, my MA advisor, and Professor Sa‘ūd b. ‘Abd al-Azīz al-Khalaf, my teacher and friend, for all their kind services and generosity. Additionally, one of my greatest honors in life has been the tutelage that I received at the hands of Shaykh Muḥammad b. Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn (d. 1421/2001); he has long since moved on from this world, but his dedication, humbleness and sincerity have left an indelible mark on me.

I must also gratefully acknowledge the help and companionship of my fellow graduate students over the course of my memory-filled five years at Yale, beginning with Mahan Mirza who was instrumental in convincing me to study at this great institution. I shall never forget his profound remark, “If you wish to *study* Ibn Taymiyya, go to Oxford, but if you wish to *become* an Ibn Taymiyya come to Yale!” It provoked laughter back then, so many years ago, and it continues to provoke laughter now. I don’t feel qualified to comment on the veracity of that statement, but I am grateful to him nonetheless for his companionship and camaraderie during my early years at Yale. My other friends in the graduate program deserve special mention:

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## Transliteration

The following Arabic transliteration conventions have been adopted for this dissertation:

أ	'	ع	'
إ	ā	غ	gh
ب	b	ف	f
ت	t	ق	q
ث	th	ك	k
ج	j	ل	l
ح	h	م	m
خ	kh	ن	n
د	d	ه	h
ذ	dh	و	w/ū
ر	r	ي	y/ī
ز	z	ـ	a
س	s	ـ	u
ش	sh	ـ	i
ص	ṣ	أو	aw
ض	ḍ	أي	ay
ط	ṭ		
ظ	ẓ		

Also note:

- The *lām* of the definite article is always written, even before *shamsī* letters. So *al-shams* and *al-qamar*.
- In names and other *iḍāfas*, the *hamza al-waṣl* is not given special consideration. So *Abū al-‘Abbās* (and not *Abū-l ‘Abbās*).
- The *tā’ marbūṭa* is rendered as a final *a* (and not *ah*). So *sunna* and not *sunnah*.

# Introduction

A. J. Arberry wrote,<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the relationship between revelation and reason is indeed one of the most famous and profound topics in the history of human thought. It is a topic which, though debated without intermission now for some two thousand years, appears not to lose anything of its fascination and freshness for all the dust overspreading the countless volumes of the dead, or seemingly dead, metaphysics and theology.

The reason for this perpetual fascination is obvious: in every generation, believers in a Divine Book must grapple with attempts at reconciling the teachings of their book with truth-claims that emanate from without that book, be it from society, culture, other books that claim divine origin, human experience, or the findings of empirical science. Early Muslims grappled with the age-old question of free-will versus determinism; medieval Muslims spent much time discussing God's Divine Attributes; modern Muslims are struggling with issues of human rights and sexuality in light of current sentiments versus Qur'ānic commandments.

It is this perpetual tension between reason and revelation that motivated me to venture into this topic. In particular, I was interested in seeing how those who valued the sanctity of the Qur'ān and Sunna, and remained devoted to their Revealed Texts, could defend their stances in light of the seemingly legitimate criticisms that others

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<sup>1</sup> A. J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 7.

implicated upon them. And what better representative to choose in order to defend the purity of the Revelation than one of the most significant and fascinating theologians of medieval Islam, ‘Shaykh al-Islam’ Ibn Taymiyya al-Ḥarrānī (d. 728/1348).

Ibn Taymiyya is almost universally acknowledged as one of the primary representatives of a more fundamentalist strain of Islam. He is clearly not a ‘founder’ of this strand, as he has plenty of predecessors, dating back to at least Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), if not before. However, what sets Ibn Taymiyya apart from his predecessors and successors is his unique amalgamation of the Ḥanbalī tradition from within which he emanated (and his mastery of the ‘internal’ sciences of the Islamic tradition), and his foray into the ideas of his opponents as well. His curiosity spurred him to study and analyze the books of his adversaries, including those of the ancient Greeks, and by doing so he ignored the stern warnings of his more conservative Ḥanbalī forerunners. The resulting persona was absolutely unparalleled in mediaeval Islam – a strict and fierce spirit adhering to Sunnī Orthodoxy, yet an intellectual mind that had been exposed to the logic of the Greeks, the *kalām* rhetoric of the Mu‘tazilīs and Ash‘arīs, and the esoteric literature of the Ṣūfīs and Isma‘īlīs.

His legacy was mixed: he left no neutral admirers or critics. Later Muslims either looked up to and aggrandized him (to the level of the one and only ‘Shaykh al-Islām’ that history has ever seen), or hated and despised him (some even considering him a heretic or unbeliever).

The Western study of Ibn Taymiyya, however, has not been as bipartisan. Most researchers could not help but feel some level of scorn at such a hard-headed,

uncompromising fundamentalist. Goldziher considers him a ‘zealot’,<sup>1</sup> Fakhry dismissively states that he did not reach the “...intellectual stature of al-Ghazālī”;<sup>2</sup> others have described him as ‘anti-rationalist’<sup>3</sup> and a ‘hater of logic’.<sup>4</sup> Arberry, inherently sympathetic to those Muslim figures that had absorbed the learning of the ancient Greeks, writes poetically that “...the sweet reason of Averroes’ patient voice would be silenced by the thunder of Ibn Taymiyya’s uncompromising denunciation.”<sup>5</sup> Worse, he has even been considered the direct primogenitor of Islamic terrorist movements and a theological forerunner to the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.<sup>6</sup> It is only relatively recently that he has found a handful of sympathizers in the halls of Western academies.<sup>7</sup>

My own exposure to this figure has been somewhat extensive. Having studied for ten years at the Islamic University of Medina, which views itself as following his methodology, I had read numerous works and been familiarized not just with his theology, but also his contributions to law, ḥadīth, *tafsīr*, language and other

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<sup>1</sup> I. Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> M. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 326.

<sup>3</sup> H. Ziai, “Recent Trends in Arabic and Persian Philosophy,” in P. Adamson and R. Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 414; M. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 326.

<sup>4</sup> T. Street, “Logic” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, p. 253.

<sup>5</sup> A. J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 69

<sup>6</sup> In the official *9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), the author(s) clearly identify Ibn Taymiyya as the founder of an intolerant, extreme brand of Islam that spawned the likes of, *inter alia*, bin Laden, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Wahhabism. It states, ‘With [such people] there is no common ground ... on which to begin a dialogue’; *ibid.*, p. 362. Another report accuses Ibn Taymiyya of opening the door of *takfir* on fellow Muslims and legitimizing armed rebellion against rulers who were deemed ‘insufficient Muslims’; see S. Ulph, *Towards a Curriculum for the Teaching of Jihadist Ideology* (Washington: The Jamestown Foundation, 2010), p. 8, pp. 26-8. Such overly simplistic and sensationalist generalizations have, unfortunately, become a hallmark of mainstream media outlets.

<sup>7</sup> Of particular note are the works of Jon Hoover, Wael Hallaq, Yahya Michot and Ovamir Anjum.

disciplines. During the course of writing my MA thesis on Jahm b. Ṣafwān,<sup>1</sup> I had scoured many volumes of Ibn Taymiyya, searching for his tidbits on early *kalām* and the persona of Jahm. And it was during this scouring that I first read (or perhaps skimmed over would be more accurate) large sections of the *Dar' al-ta'āruḍ*, and was greatly drawn to its content. I made it one of my goals to read the word critically as soon as I finished my MA thesis. I had no idea at the time that eventually I would be writing my PhD dissertation on the work.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter seeks to contextualize Ibn Taymiyya in general, and the *Dar'* in particular. It begins with a detailed foray into the development of *kalām* and its eventually adoption into a faction of Sunnī Islam via the forerunners of Ash'arism. This adoption will lead us through the primary figures of Ash'arism, from its eponymous founder, and culminating, for the purposes of this dissertation, with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). Special attention is paid in attempting to understand *why* this school quickly gained such prominence, and therefore specific events in Nishapur and the role of the Niẓāmiyya Colleges will be discussed. Al-Rāzī's life and his *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* is then analyzed, and his 'Universal Principle', which is the claim that intellectual proofs trump religious texts in the case of conflict, is examined, with a survey of its historical development during the previous three centuries. The last section of this chapter is a brief summary of the life and works of Ibn Taymiyya drawn from the primary sources, and a detailed discussion of the various names, date of writing, and printings of the *Dar'*. Ibn Taymiyya's writings that seem to overlap with the *Dar'*, and in particular his

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<sup>1</sup> Published as: Y. Qadhi, *Maqālāt al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān wa atharuhā fī l-firaq al-Islāmiyya*, 2 vols., (Riyad: Aḍwā al-salaf, 2005).

*Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, are contrasted and compared with the *Dar'*, to indicate the primary differences.

The second chapter concerns itself with examining the *Dar'* in more detail. It begins by summarizing the contents of this ten-volume tome in two manners: firstly, a sequential summary of Ibn Taymiyya's forty-four points; and, secondly, a holistic categorization of these points into broader categories. The latter half of this chapter extracts Ibn Taymiyya's conception and definition of both '*aql* (reason) and *naql* (Revelation), which then allows us to formulate his version of a working relationship between these two concepts. The chapter is concluded by proposing a 'Taymiyyan' equivalent of al-Rāzī's 'Universal Principal'.

The third and final chapter concentrates on Ibn Taymiyya's notion of the *fitra*, which he considered the primary source for man's intrinsic knowledge of God. Hence, the chapter begins with his criticisms of the *kalām* proofs for God's existence, and then extrapolates, from dozens of his passages, his understanding of the human *fitra*. After this, a brief yet comprehensive survey is undertaken that examines the historical development of the notion of the *fitra* in both the Ḥanbalī and Ash'arī tradition. Then, Ibn Taymiyya's unique contributions to this notion, and his attempt at using it as a means of validating both the truth of the Qur'ān and correct reason, are explained. By way of example of what the differing views of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Rāzī entail, the Qur'ānic story of Abraham's search for God via an examination the celestial objects is contrasted between the interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya and the interpretation of al-Rāzī. The chapter concludes by extrapolating Ibn Taymiyya's epistemological paradigm as based on the triad notions of the *fitra*, the human intellect, and Revelation.

The conclusion summarizes the primary findings of this dissertation, and offers suggestions for further research.

It is hoped that this dissertation sheds some constructive light on the figure of Ibn Taymiyya, and demonstrates that, regardless of how one feels about his views, Ibn Taymiyya's attempts at defending his understanding of Islam are modeled, not only after historical precedents from early Islam, but also on a very cogent and meticulously formulated anatomy of reason and revelation.

# CHAPTER ONE

*Setting the Stage*

The phenomenon of Ibn Taymiyya in general, and the *Dar' ta'ārud al-'aql wa-l-naql* ('Averting the Conflict of Reason with Revelation' – henceforth the *Dar'*) in particular, cannot be understood in isolation from theological developments and socio-political events that the first seven centuries of Islam witnessed. Ibn Taymiyya represents the most significant medieval attempt of the traditionalist Ḥanbalī school to revive their thought and wrest claims of Sunnī 'orthodoxy' from the rival Ash'arīs, who had achieved political and intellectual dominance by that time.

In order to better contextualize the work and its author, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section will provide a brief overview of the beginnings of the science of didactic theology, or *kalām*. The second section will offer a detailed survey of the evolution of Ash'arism, both from a political and a theological perspective. Particular emphasis will be paid to the relationship of early Ash'arī scholars with traditionalist (or Ḥanbalī) theologians. Section three provides an overview of the life of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his work *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* (whose critique was the *raison d'être* of writing the *Dar'*), and the fourth and final section summarizes the life of Ibn Taymiyya and situates the *Dar'* amongst his other writings, in particular the *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya* ('An Elucidation of the Deceit of the Jahmīs'), whose role and aim might appear to parallel that of the *Dar'*.

## 1. *The Genesis of Kalām*

Early Islamic history saw the rise of a number of theological controversies, the most significant of which were: the criterion of selecting leaders and their function in society; the issue of defining faith (*īmān*); the effects of sin on salvation; and

predestination versus free-will. Such debates amongst the nascent Muslim community led to the formation of groups that would later be identified as Sunnism, Shīism, Qadarism, and Khārijism.<sup>1</sup> For the first hundred years or so after the death of the Prophet, the issue of the nature of God and the question of how to understand scriptural references to the Divine Attributes does not seem to have surfaced. When that controversy finally did erupt in the middle of the second Islamic/eighth Christian century, it would take center stage for the next five hundred years, eclipsing and absorbing the earlier controversies, and resulting in the formation of at least half a dozen schools of thought.

Most early Muslim references state that the first person to begin questioning the nature of God's Attributes was a certain enigmatic Ja‘d b. Dirham (d. *cir.* 110/728).<sup>2</sup> If these early sources are to be trusted, we learn that Ja‘d claimed, *inter alia*, that God could not ‘love’ Abraham nor did He ‘speak’ to Moses. Based on his denial of God’s ability to speak, he argued that the Qur’ān must actually be God’s speech in a metaphorical manner, and not actually God’s speech. Hence, argued Ja‘d, the Qur’ān

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<sup>1</sup> See: K. Blankinship, “The early creed,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. T. J. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 33-40; W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), relevant chapters; T. Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology*, tr. Thomas Thornton (Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), pp. 31-71.

<sup>2</sup> The persona of Ja‘d remains understudied, primarily because of the paucity of reliable information we have regarding him. There are some references to him in theological works written in the third and fourth Islamic centuries (see in particular Dr. al-Tamīmī’s work cited below); however it is only medieval writers, such as Ibn al-Athīr and al-Dhahabī, who provide a more complete picture of his life and times.

Dr. Muḥammad al-Tamīmī, my advisor for my MA thesis, compiled most of the early quotes and biographical details regarding Ja‘d in his work *Maqāla al-ṭa‘til wa-l-Ja‘d b. Dirham* (Riyāḍ: Maktaba Aḍwā al-Salaf, 1997). My own MA thesis, which centered on Jahm b. Ṣafwān, was originally conceived as being a follow-up of that study. Also see: van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 493-507, and vol. 4, pp. 449-458; T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, p. 101.

Ja‘d’s execution date remains uncertain, with figures ranging from 106/724 to 124/742. M. al-Tamīmī suggests a death date for Ja‘d of 110/728 (*idem.*, *Maqāla al-ṭa‘til wa-l-Ja‘d b. Dirham*, p. 157).

must be created. And with this doctrine, Sunnī theologians claim,<sup>1</sup> we may mark the beginnings of the science that later was called *kalām*.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of whether Ja‘d as a person began such a discussion (or even existed), all theological and historical sources of medieval Islam point out that during the second Islamic century, talk had begun in Muslim circles regarding God’s Attributes and predestination. The question arises as to what triggered these conversations and debates. While various sources have been postulated, most would agree that intra-Christian controversies played a direct role (perhaps even supplying the term ‘*kalām*’ from the ‘*logos*’ of Biblical fame).<sup>3</sup> The fact that earlier debates over issues of predestination played a crucial role to jumpstart a similar discussion in Islamic circles shows that the

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, we need to be skeptical as to how true such claims actually are. Ja‘d did not leave any writings, nor did he have a full-fledged theological school. The earliest references of him were written almost a hundred years after his death, by those who were already hostile against him and who had formed an extremely negative view of his persona. As with many other matters during this early era, genuine research remains difficult and one needs to take such reports with a grain of salt. It is entirely plausible that Ja‘d’s persona might have been fabricated, or, more likely, that he played a marginal role in the development of *kalām*.

<sup>2</sup> One cannot help but sympathize with R. M. Frank’s observation regarding the study of *kalām*, made almost half a century ago: “Alas, however, studies on the subject still stem, it seems, from Babel, for there is no consensus, even among serious scholars, concerning the real nature of the early *kalām* as a theology, its character as a speculative science, the basic meaning of its major theses, or even how one should approach the raw texts;” R. M. Frank, “The *kalām*: An Art of Contradiction-Making or Theological Science?” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1968), vol. 88, no. 2, p. 295.

This issue appears to have occupied the author’s mind, as it did his career, for the next few decades; a good summary of his findings, and an attempt to introduce the methodological framework of this science, is found in his article: “The Science of *Kalām*,” in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* (1992), vol. 2, pp. 7-27.

<sup>3</sup> M. A. Cook, “The Origins of *Kalām*,” p. 32; W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2002), pp. 182-4; D. Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, p. 16, 125-131; F. E. Peters, “The Greek and Syrian Background,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S. H. Nasr (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 40-51; M. S. Abdel Haleem, “Early *kalām*,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S. H. Nasr, p. 72.

The Christian influence is not the only one posited: others have sought to find some source in Indian, Mazdeism, and Manichaeism thought. See *EI2*, s.v., ‘*Kalām*'; D. B. Macdonald, “Continuous Re-Creation and Atomic Time in Muslim Scholastic Theology,” *Isis*, vol. 9 (1927), p. 330; S. N. Haq “The Indian and Persian Background,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. S. H. Nasr, pp. 53-56; T. Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology*, pp. 100-1.

Shlomo Pines championed the claim that there was a ‘strong probability’ of direct or indirect Buddhist influence on *kalām*; his primary evidence is an attempt to correlate *kalām* epistemological terminology, such as ‘*ilm darūrī* and ‘*ilm naṣarī*, to Buddhist equivalents, since, according to him, such concepts are not found in Greek thought. See his “A Study on the Impact of Indian, Mainly Buddhist, Thought on Some Aspects of *Kalām* Doctrines,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* (1994), vol. 17, p. 189, pp. 198-201. Personally I don’t find these arguments very convincing.

influence of intra-Christian polemics on Muslim theology has a clear precedent.<sup>1</sup> Some have specifically pointed out Monophysite polemics against the Dyotheletes (written in Syriac) as a direct source of *kalām*,<sup>2</sup> while others have highlighted the role of Christian converts to the new religion.<sup>3</sup> It is also quite clear that Hellenistic controversies, such as theories of nature, the existence of atoms, and other cosmological notions, played a major role in the development of early *kalām*,<sup>4</sup> and this is further manifested by the adoption of elements of Stoicism in *kalām* epistemology.<sup>5</sup> Subscribers to *kalām*, of course, present the science as being a purely Qur'ānic one, originating as a result of the verses that encourage man to reflect and think upon the creation.<sup>6</sup>

A proximate cause of such thought in Arab and Muslim circles could possibly be the persona of John of Damascus (d. 749 CE). If we are to believe these early accounts of Ja‘d, the parallels between their two doctrines suggests more than just a coincidental

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<sup>1</sup> M. A. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma*, p. 146, and pp. 149-52.

<sup>2</sup> M. A. Cook, in “The Origins of *Kalām*,” (see esp. p. 38), leans towards this conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> J. van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, tr. Jane Marie Todd (Boston: Harvard Press, 2006), p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> A. I. Sabra, “*Kalām* Atomism as an Alternative Philosophy to Hellenizing *Falsafa*,” in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One, Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank* (Leuven: 2006), p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> Van Ess writes that ‘...while *kalām* is not entirely identical with Stoic logic...it is built on a Stoic basis;’ see his “The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology” in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. G. E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden; O. Harrassowitz, 1970), p. 32. Later, after demonstrating this influence via *kalām* categorizations and terminologies, he states, “Old Hellenistic school quarrels seem to have found their way into Islam, attenuated perhaps and somewhat simplified, but viable and organically adopted,” *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> M. S. Abul Haleem defends this view, and writes, “*Kalām* thus originated completely in the Islamic environment and foreign elements came only later as a result of mixing with other nations and also as a result of the translation of Greek texts into Arabic.” See his “Early *kalām*,” *op. cit.*, p. 79.

similarity; and even if Ja‘d’s role has been exaggerated, John of Damascus’s era, circle of influence, and theology are persuading factors to argue for some direct influence.<sup>1</sup>

Be that as it may, the early execution of Ja‘d made it impossible for him to propagate his ideas, and it was left to his disciple, Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 124/741), to champion such theological causes.<sup>2</sup> While the existence of an actual distinct group named after him is disputed,<sup>3</sup> there is no doubt that such talk, previously unknown to Muslim ears, was of primal importance in the formation of the first Muslim group to develop a complete and systematic theology: the Mu‘tazilīs, who posited views on God

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<sup>1</sup> The possible influence of John of Damascus has been pointed out by many researchers, including: Y. Ibib, *The Political Doctrine of al-Baqillani*, p. 17; Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, p. 184; A. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, p. 21.

In my MA thesis, *Maqālāt al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān wa-atharuhā fī l-firaq al-Islāmiyya* (Riyad: Aḍwā al-salaf, 2005), vol. 1, p. 410-6, I mentioned a possible connection between Ja‘d b. Dirham and John of Damascus based on the fact that both of them are reported to have lived at the same time, in the same area, in the city of Damascus. While this is not sufficient to prove that the two ever met, much less influenced one another, it is not too far-fetched of an assumption to make, especially in light of the great similarities between the theology of John of Damascus and that of early *kalām*. Some similarities are:

- 1) The method of proving God’s existence (from which later *mutakallimūn* developed the *kalām* cosmological argument).
- 2) Understanding God’s attributes as being ‘negative Attributes’, i.e., that an Attribute does not affirm a concept but rather negates one from God (from which Ja‘d began to describe God as ‘not being ...’; a usage that appears to be unprecedented in the Islamic discourse before his time).
- 3) God as an Unsubscribed Being (from which came the standard *kalām* belief that God does not ‘occupy space’ nor can He have a direction)
- 4) God not being a ‘compounded entity’, meaning that He was pure Unicity, without the Attributes being a part of Him (from which the controversy of how best to ascribe God’s attributes to God arose within all *kalām* movements).
- 6) The immutability of God (from which the *kalām* doctrine of denying any ‘change’ in the Essence of God arose).

There are possibly other similarities as well; I intend to research this relationship in greater detail in a later paper.

<sup>2</sup> For Jahm, see: EI2, s.v., ‘Djahm b. Safwan’; R. M. Frank, “The neoplatonism of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān,” *Le Muséon*, vol. 78 (1965), pp. 395-424; J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, pp. 493-507; T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, pp. 103-4; relevant sections of my MA thesis *Maqālāt al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān wa-atharuhā fī l-firaq al-Islāmiyya*. The reference to ‘Jahmīs’ is such a constant theme in early polemical literature that I do believe it is safe to say that the persona of Jahm, in contrast to Ja‘d, had some role in the spread of proto-*kalām* ideas.

<sup>3</sup> See Watt’s discussion of this in his EI2 entry on Jahm and the Jahmiyya, s.v., ‘Djahm b. Safwan’, and ‘Djahmiyya’. Of course, early traditionalists simply used the term ‘Jahmiyya’ to describe all groups that did not affirm a literalistic understanding of the Attributes, hence there is no doubt that the term had become rather vague within a few decades of Jahm’s death.

and His Attributes, pre-destination, faith, nature, and the afterlife. Wāṣil b. ‘Atā’ (d. 132/749) is typically credited with initiating the movement. His prime contribution to Mu‘tazilī doctrine was the concept of ‘a station between two stations’ (*manzila bayna al-manzilatayn*), in which a sinner is deemed neither a believer nor a disbeliever. It is highly improbable that he himself held any specific doctrines about the nature of God and the Divine Attributes. That was left to later Mu‘tazilīs, in particular ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. 144/761), Abu al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 235/849), and the father-and-son pair, Abu ‘Alī al-Jubbātī (d. 303/915) and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbātī (d. 321/933), all of whom helped shape the doctrines of the early Mu‘tazilīs and contributed to solidifying the principles of the school.<sup>1</sup>

The doctrines of these Mu‘tazilīs, based as they were primarily on the neo-Platonic concepts imported from Christianity, quite often seemed to clash, especially in the minds of ordinary Muslims, with explicit Qur’ānic tenets and Prophetic ḥadīth. The complicated hermeneutics that Mu‘tazilīs attempted to employ on the Qur’ān in order to demonstrate that the Qur’ān supported their beliefs, and their seemingly presumptuous dismissal of the Prophetic traditions, seemed to reinforce popular notions amongst the masses that the Mu‘tazilīs were heretics bent on corrupting the pristine teachings of Islam. The drastic attempt of al-Mā’mūn (*rul.* 197-217/813-33), who ordered an Inquisition (*mihna*) to force the population to follow the key Mu‘tazilī doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān only strengthened this supposition. The failure of the *mihna* was a direct cause of the establishment of Sunnī ‘orthodoxy’, championed by the popular Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), whose simplistic message of

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<sup>1</sup> See: *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. “Mu‘tazilah” (J. van Ess); *EI2*, s.v. ‘Mu‘tazila’ (D. Gimaret); T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, p. 105-9.

understanding the Book of God ‘literally’ and believing in the Prophetic traditions harnessed much support.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, at the closing of the third Islamic century, the two major trends with regards to the createdness of the Qur’ān (and, by extension, God’s Attributes) were those of the traditionalists<sup>2</sup> (called, *inter alia*, the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, the *Ḥashwiyya*, and Sunnis) and those of the ‘rationalists’, primarily (but not exclusively) manifested in the movement of Mu’tazilism.

The first group, championed by scholars of ḥadīth and *fiqh*, such as Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, held that speculation regarding the Attributes of God led to heresy, and all that was required was a simple, unquestioning belief in the texts of the Qur’ān and ḥadīth. The primary source of theology was to take the outward meanings of religious scriptures and shun metaphorical interpretation. Creeds written by such authors typically consist of little more than verses of the Qur’ān and traditions of the Prophet, arranged topically.<sup>3</sup> A casual reader of such works will not detect any logical build-up of ideas, and might be justified in assuming that theological issues are discussed in a

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of past explanations of the *mīḥna*, see: J. Nawas, “A Reexamination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma’mūn’s Introduction of the *mīḥna*,” *IJMES*, 26 (1994), pp. 615-29. The author also takes another look at the role and effects of the *mīḥna* in his “The *mīḥna* of 218 AH/833 CE Re-visted: An Empirical Study,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 116, No. 4. (Oct. - Dec., 1996), pp. 698-708. Also see: T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term here in G. Makdisi’s sense. I agree with his basic premise that ‘traditionalism’ permeated all of the early Sunnī legal schools (with the exception of Ḥanafism, which had been penetrated deeply by the Mu’tazilīs), and the Ash’arīs sought to establish legitimacy by infiltrating one of these schools; see his “Ash’arī and the Ash’arīs in Islamic Religious History I,” *Studia Islamica*, No. 17 (1962), p. 44-8. Makdisi does not explicitly mention the relationship between these early ‘traditionalists’ and later Ḥanbalī theology; however it is clear that Ḥanbalī theology was based on traditionalist premises, and can be viewed as an extension of it. For a similar use and discussion of the term, see: W. M. Watt, “The Political Attitudes of the Mu’tazila,” *JRAS* (1963), p. 45f.

<sup>3</sup> See as an example of this: al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Khalaf, *Explanation of the Creed of al-Barbaaaree* (d. 329 AH), tr. Abu Talha Dawood Burbank (Birmingham: Al-Hidaayah Publications, 2005).

somewhat haphazard fashion. Additionally, there was clearly a very strong disapproval of using *kalām* dialectics in any matters of the religion.<sup>1</sup>

The second group, who despite their varied beliefs, were all labeled as ‘Mu‘tazilīs’, constructed an elaborate and comprehensive theology based on neo-Platonic principles, many times delving into issues that the religious texts did not seem to directly cater to (such as the types of knowledge, the means of acquiring knowledge, and the structure and properties of matter<sup>2</sup>). Their non-traditionalist, logic-based reasoning allowed them to take from non-Scriptural sources, and their hermeneutics were refined over the course of a century and became standardized in the science of *kalām*.

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<sup>1</sup> Many of these narrations have been collected by the Ḥanbalī theologian and jurist Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223), in his book *Tahrīm al-naẓar fi kutub ahl al-kalām*, which was edited and translated by G. Makdisi in his *Censure of speculative theology* (London, Luzac, 1962). They are also summarized by J. Pavlin in “Sunni *Kalām*”, *op. cit.*, p. 112-5.

<sup>2</sup> R. M. Frank, in his “The Science of *Kalām*,” p. 12-3, lays out the basic framework that almost all *mutakallim* authors followed in their theological treatises.

## 2. The Rise of the Ash‘arī School

### 2.1 ‘Sunnī Kalām’

During the first two centuries of Islam, *kalām* remained primarily a non-Sunnī phenomenon. However, early in the third Islamic century, *kalām* tendencies began to rise amongst traditionalist elements as well.<sup>1</sup> The first such theologians who came from the Sunnī tradition yet endorsed aspects of *kalām* appear to be ‘Abdullāh b. Sa‘īd, otherwise known as Ibn Kullāb (d. 241/855)<sup>2</sup> and al-Ḥārith b. Asad al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857).<sup>3</sup> While we have no writings left of the former, the latter has left us numerous treatises and manuals. We can also glean some of their theological opinions from other writings, in particular al-Ash‘arī’s *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* (‘The Book of Theological Opinions’). These two theologians seemed to part ways with the other traditionalists by claiming that God’s Attributes must be unchanging and eternal; according to them, no change could be posited in God (‘*la taḥduthu bihī al-hawādīth*’). As an example of how this modified previous Sunnī theology, they claimed that God could not speak when He

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arīs in Islamic Religious History I,” p. 51; K. Blankinship, “The early creed,” p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> For Ibn Kullāb, see: W. M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, pp. 286–9; M. Allard, *Le problème des attributs divins dans la doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī et de ses premiers grands disciples*, pp. 146–9; R. M. Frank, “The Kalām: an Art of Contradiction-Making or Theological Science?” p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> For al-Muḥāsibī, the standard monograph is by J. van Ess, *Die Gedankewelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī* (Bonn: Bonner Orientalistische Studien, 1961). Also see: M. Smith, *An Early Mystic of Baghdad: A Study of the Life and Teachings of al-Muḥāsibī* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1935); Ahmed Ates, “Two Works of al-Muḥāsibī” in *Festschrift Werner Caskel* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 37–42; T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, pp. 138–9; Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, tr. Benjamin Clark (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 161–2. For the primary Arabic sources, see: al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Khaṭīb, *Ta’rīkh Baghdaḍ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, n.d.), v. 8, pp. 211–8; al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. ‘Alī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyah al-Kubrā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad Ḥulw (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā al-Kitāb al-‘Arabiyyah, n.d.), v. 1, pp. 275–284; al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Siyar A’lām al-Nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūṭ (Lebanon: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1996), v. 12, pp. 110–2.

I have presented on the life and theology of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī at a number of seminars. I hope to eventually publish some of my findings in future papers.

chose to, but rather must be *eternally* speaking, in a manner that the creation could not comprehend through their senses.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Muḥāsibī seemed to have left a stronger impact than Ibn Kullāb, even though most view him as being a student of the latter. An authority as great as ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1038) remarks, “Most of the people of *kalām* who affirmed the attributes (*mutakallim al-ṣifātiyya*) ascribe themselves to him.”<sup>2</sup> One of the most analytical early accounts of al-Muḥāsibī’s theology is provided by al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1154). Al-Shahrastānī claimed that the earliest scholars of the traditionalists (whom he referenced as *Ahl al-Hadīth*) such as Mālik b. Anas (d. 170/787) and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 240/854), would not categorize or differentiate between the Attributes of God mentioned in the texts, and would affirm all of them, in a manner (*kayfiyya*) known to God. Since Mu’tazilīs would negate attributes, and the traditionalists would affirm them, the latter were called ‘Attributionists’ (*ṣifātiyya*) while the former were called ‘Negationists’ (*mu’attila*). This remained the case, he stated, until the time of Ibn Kullāb and al-Muḥāsibī, for these two ascribed themselves to the traditionalists, but embraced the knowledge of *kalām* and supported the doctrines of the traditionalists through *kalām* arguments and logical reasoning.<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Ḥanbal, the traditionalist Imam *par excellence*, appeared to have a falling out with Ibn Kullāb based upon this, and commanded his disciples to abstain from

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<sup>1</sup> See: al-Ash’arī, *Kitāb Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn wa-l-khtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. H. Ritter, p. 298; al-Muḥāsibī, *Fahm al-Qur’ān* (ed. Quwatlı), p. 307; J. van Ess, “Ibn Kullab et la ‘mīḥna,’” *Arabica*, Vol. 37, No. 2. (Jul., 1990), p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Aḥmad b. ‘Alī Ibn Ḥajr, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risālah, 1996), v. 1, p. 326. Also see ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-Durriya*, (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azharīyah lil-Turāth, 1994), v. 1, p. 218.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-l-Nihāl*, ed. Aḥmad Fahmī Muḥammad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1992), v. 1, p. 81.

attending his lectures, because he “....disapproved of al-Ḥārith’s looking into *kalām*, and his writing books on it.”<sup>1</sup> The status of Ibn Ḥanbal was so highly revered by this time, that such a warning forced al-Muḥāsibī to live a private life to the end of his days, and, “...when he died, no one prayed over him except four people.”<sup>2</sup> This incident appears to be the very first sign of tension within the ‘Sunnī’ movement. It would re-appear and surface time and time again over the course of the next few centuries.

Another early manifestation of this tension occurred in the far away land of Nishapur. This involved a relatively minor, yet significant, falling out between the Shāfi‘ī traditionalist Muḥammad b. Ishāq, more commonly known as Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923) and some of his disciples.<sup>3</sup> The controversy between the teacher and four of his students was over the eternality of God’s speech: does God continually speak, or does He speak when He wishes to speak?<sup>4</sup> These students followed the position of Ibn Kullāb, and claimed, based on his premise of negating accidents subsiding in the essence of God, that God is eternally speaking, for there could be no ‘change’ posited in God. Ibn Khuzayma, following the traditionalist theology of affirming the apparent understanding of Scripture, claimed that God spoke at His Will. When Ibn Khuzayma

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<sup>1</sup> The quote is from al-Khaṭīb Al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v. 8, p. 214. Also see: Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 12, p. 111; Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā* v. 5, p. 533; v. 12, p. 95; v. 7, p. 429; and v.8, p. 497; Ibn Ḥajr, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, v. 1, p. 326; Massignon, *Essay*, p. 161; van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des ḥārit al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 9-10; Smith, *al-Muḥāsibī*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, v. 8, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> In particular, Abū ‘Alī al-Thaqafī (d. 328/940) and Abū Bakr al-Ṣibghī (d. 342/953), along with two of their peers. For details of this story, see: Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-asmā’ wa-l-ṣifāt* (Jeddah: Maktaba al-Suwādī, 1993), vol 2, pp. 22-3; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 15, p. 282; Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’*, v. 2, p. 77. Also see: T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, pp. 131-32.

<sup>4</sup> It is significant to note that this very issue became a crucial difference between the later Ash‘arī school (who sided with these students) and the Ḥanbalī school (who upheld the position of Ibn Taymiyya). See, for example, Ibn Taymiyya’s position and defence in: Hoover, Jon, “God Acts by His Will and Power: Ibn Taymiyya’s Theology of a Personal God in his Treatise on the Voluntary Attributes” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapaport and Shahab Ahmed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 55-77.

was told about the beliefs of some of his students, he confronted them with this and eventually made them recant from their position.

The significance of this disagreement is that it shows, perhaps for the second time after Ibn Ḥanbal's censuring of Ibn Kullāb, the tension between the teachings of Ibn Kullāb and those of other traditionalists. At this stage, however, these intra-Sunnī disputes remained quite low-key, and the political powers of the regions were not involved. All this would change in the next generation.

It is a strange quirk of history that neither Ibn Kullāb nor al-Muḥāsibī were primarily credited with the launch of the rationalist pro-*kalām* Sunnī movement. That honor was left to a theologian who lived two generations after them: Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Isma‘īl al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935), whose teachings would eventually found an eponymous school.<sup>1</sup> Al-Ash‘arī wrote numerous works, and his writing style was at once bold and clear.

Tensions between the pro- and anti-*kalām* tendencies in Sunnī Islam arose once again, this time in the form of a scathing critique against al-Ash‘arī by the leading Ḥanbalī theologian of Baghdad in his time, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-

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<sup>1</sup> The most scholarly work on the life and writings of al-Ash‘arī remains M. Allard, *Le Problème des Attributs Divins* (Beirut: Impr. Catholique, 1965), pp. 25–48. R. M. Frank has also done considerable work in this regard; see in particular his “Elements in the development of the teaching of al-Ash‘arī,” *Le Muséon* 104 (1991), pp. 141–190. R. McCarthy’s work, *The Theology of al-Ash‘arī* (Beirut: Impr. Catholique, 1953), while outdated in many areas, nonetheless remains a valuable introduction.

Some possible causes of the fame of al-Ash‘arī over those who preceded him can be: 1) his relationship as the stepson of the famous Mu‘tazilī al-Jubbātī; 2) his melodramatic public conversion; and, 3) the thoroughness and quantity of his theological writings, which far surpassed anything that either Ibn Kullāb or al-Muḥāsibī are alleged to have written. To this, it is also possible to add the effects of Ibn Ḥanbal’s censure of al-Muḥāsibī, which would have made it highly difficult for Sunnīs to take al-Muḥāsibī as a founding role model.

Barbahārī (d. 329/940).<sup>1</sup> It appears that al-Barbahārī rebuffed al-Ash‘arīs claims to be a follower of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, despite multiple attempts to prove this. If a pro-Ḥanbalī source is to be believed, al-Ash‘arī sought to ingratiate himself with al-Barbahārī by boasting of his refutations against various Mu‘tazilīs and non-believers, to which al-Barbahārī responded that his (*viz.*, al-Ash‘arī’s) style was unknown to him, and the only manner that he recognized was that of Ibn Ḥanbal.<sup>2</sup> The message was clear: al-Ash‘arī was not deemed to be a true follower of the path of Ibn Ḥanbal, and he was, in the eyes of this Ḥanbalī theologian, in fact closer in methodology to his opponents than he was to his supposed allies. This rejection may have resulted in the writing of al-Ash‘arīs *Ibāna ‘an ‘uṣūl al-diyāna* (‘An Elucidation on the Foundations of the Religion’), which is at odds with his other writings, since he seems to affirm far more Divine Attributes than he does in other works.<sup>3</sup> When such a conciliatory approach did not work, al-Ash‘arī decided to take on al-Barbahārī full-throttle, and wrote his *al-Hathth ‘alā al-baḥth* (‘The Encouragement to Research’), in which he defended the use of *kalām* against its detractors.<sup>4</sup> This is the first work written by an author claiming allegiance to Sunnism yet defending the usage and role of *kalām*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, vol. 3, pp. 36-8; M. Allard, *Doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī*, pp. 103-4, R. M. Frank, “al-Ash‘arī’s ‘Kitāb al-Hathth ‘Alā al-baḥth,’” MIDEO, vol 18 (1988), p. 99; C. Melchert, “The Ḥanābila and Early Sufis,” *Arabica*, vol. 48, (2001), pp. 365-7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, vol. 3, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> The discrepancy of thought between this one work and his others has been mentioned and expounded on by, *inter alia*, Goldziher, Wensinck, Makdisi, and Gardet. See: A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 92-3; G. Makdisi, “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arīs in Islamic Religious History I,” p. 42, and “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arīs in Islamic Religious History II,” p. 23-6 (though it should be noted that Makdisi is skeptical of the attribution of this work to al-Ash‘arī); EI2 , s.v. ‘Kalām’ (L. Gardet).

<sup>4</sup> M. Allard, *Doctrine d’al-Ash‘arī*, pp. 206-10.

<sup>5</sup> It was translated by R. McCarthy in his *The Theology of al-Ash‘arī*, p. 117-141 as ‘A Vindication of *Kalām*’. It is commonly known as the *Risāla fi istiḥsān al-khwāḍ fi ‘ilm al-kalām*. In a detailed study and translation of the work, R. M.

Al-Ash‘arī’s impact was on a small circle of students in Baghdad, in particular Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī (d. ca. 370/981)<sup>1</sup> and Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Mujāhid (d. 370/981).<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, their writings have not survived, and it is very difficult to assess how, if at all, they further developed the teachings of the school that their teacher founded.

The next major codifier and developer of Ash‘arī thought (called ‘the second al-Ash‘arī’) was a judge of Baghdad, al-Qādī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), whose work *al-Tamhīd* laid the methodological foundations for all future Ash‘arī works of theology.<sup>3</sup> It was also al-Bāqillānī who won over many converts to the school, and coined the term ‘Ash‘arī’ to describe the school.<sup>4</sup>

However, it was not in Baghdad that Ash‘arism flourished. Baghdad remained a stronghold of traditionalist thought for another century, and, as shall be discussed below, when Ash‘arism eventually was introduced into the public discourse in Baghdad, it caused a political turmoil of the highest magnitude, so much so that the Caliph himself was forced to intervene and quell the tension.

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Frank has pointed out that this title is probably from a scribe or editor. See: R. M. Frank, “al-Ash‘arī’s ‘Kitāb al-Ḥathth ‘Alā al-baḥth,’” p. 84. Also see: A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p. 93 n. 2; T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, pp. 149–52.

<sup>1</sup> Not much can be gleaned regarding his life and thought; even his full name and exact date of death seem to be lost. However, he did teach *kalām* to al-Bāqillānī, al-Isfaraīnī, and Ibn Fūrak. See: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn kadhīb al-muftarī*, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> See: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> For al-Bāqillānī, see: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 217–26; Éric Chaumont, “Bāqillānī, théologien ash‘arite et usūliste mālikite, contre les légistes à propos de ‘l’ijtihād’ et de l’accord unanime de la communauté,” *Studia Islamica*, No. 79 (1994), pp. 79–102; Yusuf Ibish, *The Political Doctrines of al-Baqillani* (Beirut: AUB Press, 1966), pp. 14–18; George Makdisi’s review of R. McCarthy’s edition of al-Bāqillānī’s *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Winter, 1959), pp. 105–106.

Of course, al-Bāqillānī did base much of his methodology on al-Ash‘arī’s writings as well; see T. Nagel, *A History of Islamic Theology*, p. 160.

<sup>4</sup> R. McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ash‘arī*, p. 202.

It was not the followers of al-Ash‘arī in the heartland cities of Baghdad and Basra who would eventually triumph, but rather his followers in the outlying provinces of Nishapur (modern-day Iran). Ash‘arism would be exported from its birthplace of Basra and Baghdad, to the outlying lands of Nishapur, where it would develop and win many converts, some of whom would wield great political might. It was these supporters who would eventually reintroduce a modified and updated version of Ash‘arism in the very cities where it originated from, but this time, rather than being shunned and frowned upon, the new theology, with support from a new government, would supplant and dominate all other theologies, eventually becoming the official theology of the Muslim State. How this occurred will be the topic of the next section.

## ***2.2 The Political Establishment of Ash‘arism***

In this section, we shall attempt to give a skeletal outline of the rise of Ash‘arīs as a political force. Only those events, persons and geographic regions that played a crucial role in this story will be mentioned. Particular emphasis will be placed on Ash‘arī-traditionalist interactions and frictions, for it was the culmination of such friction that resulted in the animosity and rivalry between the two schools, and which explains much of Ibn Taymiyya’s focus.

### **2.2.1 The Nishapurian Connection**

Al-Ash‘arī himself lived and died in Iraq. Within a century of his death, however, the practitioners of the school primarily concentrated in the neighboring region of Khurasān and its capital, Nishapur. Nishapur eventually became the primary bastion of Ash‘arī thought, producing such luminaries as Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), al-Isfarāīnī (d. 418/1027), al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1073), al-Juwainī (d. 478/1086), and al-Ghazālī (d.

505/1111). How this occurred is a fascinating story in its own right, but also a story that is a direct prelude to the political dominance of the Ash‘arī school. For this reason, a brief summary of it is necessary.

The city of Nishapur was under the rule of the Sāmānids from 287/899 to 395/1005.<sup>1</sup> The Sāmānids were a Sunnī dynasty, with strong connections to traditionalist Sunnī thought.<sup>2</sup> They fought a number of battles with the Zaydīs who had founded an empire in the neighboring province of Ṭabāristān. Nishapur was the intellectual and theological capital of Iran at the time, and many factions, religious and ethnic, were battling for control and domination.<sup>3</sup> At the turn of the fourth Islamic century, Nishapur was host to Isma‘īlīs, Mu‘tazilīs, Karrāmīs,<sup>4</sup> Ḥanafīs and traditionalists. In terms of legal schools, the Ḥanafī, Shāfi‘ī and Karrāmī schools dominated; the first was inclined towards Mu‘tazilī thought, the second to traditionalist Sunnism,<sup>5</sup> and the

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<sup>1</sup> For the Sāmānid dynasty, see *EI2*, s.v. ‘Sāmānids’ (C. E. Bosworth); C. E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties*, p. 170. The Sāmānids were gifted the province of Khurasān in 287/899; previously, they were rulers of Balkh only.

<sup>2</sup> The Sāmānid ruler Ismā‘īl b. Aḥmad (*rul. 279-95/892-907*) in whose reign the dynasty reached its apogee, is reputed to have given great respect to the scholars. The Shāfi‘ī jurist Muḥammad b. Naṣr in particular was patronized by him (*Ibn al-Athīr, al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, vol. 8 p. 2). His son, Aḥmad (d. 301/914), was in fact assassinated by his Turkish slaves because of his excessive favoring of the ‘ulamā; see *EI2*, s.v. ‘Samanid’ (C. E. Bosworth). This, however, did not prevent them from patronizing other factions as well, for Ibn Sīna was also a regular visitor to the Samanid court. Also see: W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, pp. 26-7; C. E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties*, pp. 170-1; R. N. Frye, “The Samānids”, in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, pp. 136-61.

<sup>3</sup> See: *EI2*, s.v. ‘Nishāpūr’ (E. Honigmann [C.E. Bosworth]); R. Bulliet, “Local Politics in Eastern Iran Under the Ghaznavids and Seljuqs,” p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> See: C. E. Bosworth, “The rise of the Karāmiyyah in Khurasan,” pp. 5-14; *EI2*, ‘Karramiyya’ (Bosworth); M. Malamud, “Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan: The Karramiyya in Nishapur,” pp. 37-51; R. W. Bulliet, “The Political-Religious History of Nishapur in the Eleventh Century,” p. 76; W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, pp. 40-43. For a monograph in Arabic, see: S. M. Mukhtār, *al-Tajsīm ‘ind al-Muslimīn: Madhhab al-Karrāmiyya* (Cairo: Sharika al-Iskandariyya li-l-ṭibā‘a wa-l-nashr, 1971). Also see my entry in *Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, ed. Gerhard Bowering et. al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), s.v. ‘Karrāmiyya’ (Y. Qadhi).

<sup>5</sup> Almost a century and a half later, in around 450/1058, the Ash‘arī theologian Abū Ishāq al-Shirāzī laments that many ‘ignorant’ Shāfi‘īs follow the school in legal matters, but are ‘Ḥanbalī’ in issues of theology; *idem, al-Ishāra*, p. 199. Many of the early Shāfi‘īs were clearly anti-*kalām* in their discourses, including the first batch that introduced the legal school to Nishapur. See: W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, p. 28.

third to its own unique theology, even though Karrāmī beliefs also found a strong foothold amongst segments of Ḥanafīs as well.<sup>1</sup>

Out of all of these groups, only the Karrāmīs were unique to Nishapur. The eponymous founder of the movement, Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Karrām (d. 255/869), lived most of his life in Nishapur, and converted large segments of the population to his teachings.<sup>2</sup> He preached a unique theology, similar to traditionalist Islam in many aspects,<sup>3</sup> and he also founded his own legal school.<sup>4</sup>

The Sāmānids clearly favored the traditionalists Sunnis; when they took over Nishapur from the Ṣaffārids in 286/899, they approached the traditionalist-Shāfi‘ī Ibn Khuzayma (whose report with his Kullābī-influenced students has been mentioned) and asked him to choose a judge for them, which he did.<sup>5</sup> Eventually, around the turn of the fourth Islamic century (tenth Christian century) the Sāmānids placed a slave-dynasty of Turkish origin, the Simjūrids,<sup>6</sup> as local governors over Khurasān. The Simjūrids also

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<sup>1</sup> M. Malamud, “The Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan: The Karrāmiyya in Nishapur,” p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> See: C. E. Bosworth, “The Rise of the Karrāmiyyah,” p. 6. Ibn Taymiyya, writing centuries after their demise, claimed that the Karrāmīs had unique positions in their understanding of faith and sin, but were inclined towards anthropomorphism when it came to understanding God’s attributes; see *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, v. 3 p. 103 and 185.

<sup>4</sup> For examples of their unique legal rulings, see A. Zysow, “Two Unrecognized Karrāmī Texts,” JAOS, vol. 108, no. 4 (1988), pp. 577-87.

<sup>5</sup> R. Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup> See: EI2, s.v. ‘Simdjūrids’ (C. E. Bosworth).

favored the Shāfi‘ī school,<sup>1</sup> which had been introduced to Nishapur in the middle of the second Islamic century.<sup>2</sup>

However, when the Ghaznavids came to power, they supported the Karrāmīs over the other schools. That the Ghaznavids were, by and large, patrons of the Karrāmī school is beyond doubt. It appears that their association with this theological school was due to historical factors.<sup>3</sup> During the reign of Sebüktigin, the leader of the Karrāmīs was a certain Abū Ya‘qūb Ishāq b. Maḥmashād (d. 383/993). According to later accounts, he was a fiery and eloquent preacher, allegedly having converted thousands of Christians and Zoroastrians to the new faith. His piety and oratory skills had such a profound impact on Sebüktigin that he adopted the theological school as his own. His secretary, Abū al-Fath Bustī, versified,<sup>4</sup>

*The only true fiqh is that of Abū Ḥanīfa, just as the only true religion is that of Muḥammad b. Karrām*

*And I believe that anyone who rejects Muḥammad b. Karrām’s belief is indeed vile*

It is significant to note that the ‘official’ religious systems seem to have favored an amalgamation of Karrāmī theology and Ḥanafī fiqh. Rather pointedly, and prescient of times to come, we are informed at this stage, by a passing visitor, of growing

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> The first Shāfi‘ī recorded is a certain Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ḥafs al-Ḥarashī (d. 263/877). See: R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 90. Others attribute the spread of the school to two later authorites: Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwadī (d. 294/907) and Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Khuzayma (d. 311/923). Interestingly, both of the latter figures were very vocal in support of traditionalist theology. See: W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> R. Bulliet, in his “Local Politics in Easter Iran Under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks”, p. 42, sees this alliance as simply being one of ‘the enemy’s enemy is my friend’; since the previous rulers (the Simjūrids) had been pro-Shāfi‘ī, the Ghaznavids had to be pro-Ḥanafī, hence Karrāmī. I believe such simplistic readings do not take into account religious sentiments that would have been expected amongst such groups, especially in light of the historical connection between Maḥmūd’s family and the Karrāmīs.

<sup>4</sup> M. Malamud, “Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan,” p. 45; C. E. Bosworth, “The rise of the Karāmiyyah in Khurasan,” p. 74; R. W. Bulliet, “Nishapur in the Eleventh Century,” p. 76.

tensions in Nishapur between the Karrāmīs and other groups.<sup>1</sup> These tensions seem to have reached boiling point in the next century.

Sebüktigin's son, Sultān Maḥmūd of Ghazna (d. 421/1030), continued his father's patronage of the Karrāmīs, and the cleric Abū Ya‘qūb's son, Abū Bakr Muḥammad, was given a prominent position of authority, one that he exploited against other sects. He had many Isma‘īlīs executed or imprisoned, and also instigated the Sultān to attack the neighboring Zaydī kingdom in Ṭabāristān. Since the growing Shī‘ī threat was felt throughout Sunnī lands, the Sultān received warm accolades from the Caliph in Baghdad for both of these undertakings.<sup>2</sup> Maḥmūd also targeted certain Ash‘arī theologians as heretics.<sup>3</sup>

The Karrāmīs eventually lost favor with the ruling Ghaznavids,<sup>4</sup> who very conveniently engineered the physical relocation of their senior clerics from Nishapur

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<sup>1</sup> The chronicler is al-Maqdisī, also known as al-Muqaddisī (d. 390/1000); see: R. Bulliet, “Local Politics in Eastern Iran Under the Ghaznavids and Seljuqs,” p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Al-‘Utbī, *Kitāb Yamīnī*, pp. 438-444, 467; C. E. Bosworth, “The Rise of the Karāmiyyah,” pp. 9-11.

<sup>3</sup> The reference here is to Ibn Fūrak; we shall discuss his case in more detail below.

<sup>4</sup> Why this is so is the subject of some dispute. The classical work on this subject, the *Kitāb Yamīnī* of al-‘Utbī, states (pp. 471-9) that Sultān Maḥmūd underwent a theological conversion when the Mu‘tazilite Judge of the city, al-Qādī Abū al-‘Ulā Sa‘īd b. Muḥammad, engaged in a debate with the Karrāmī leader, the younger Maḥmashād, and won in that debate. However, M. Malamud argues that the Karrāmī prohibition of excessive earnings, and their extreme hatred of other groups, eventually led to their fall from grace, and paved the way for the Ash‘arī-Shafī‘ī faction to rise in Nishapur; see: *idem.*, “Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan,” pp. 50-1. C. E. Bosworth, on the other hand, argues that the Ghaznavid leader simply could not remain inactive in the face of Karrāmī fanaticism and their ‘purges’ against other nobles; see: *idem.*, “The Rise of the Karāmiyyah,” pp. 12-13.

I do not find R. Bulliet’s position of deriving Maḥmūd’s theological convictions based on numismatic evidence, which he elaborates on in his “A Mu‘tazilī Coin of Maḥmūd of Ghazna,” *American Numismatic Society Musem Notes*, vol. XV (1969), pp. 126-9, convincing. This is so for a number of reasons. Firstly, the verse in question that is inscribed on the coin (viz., Q. 3:17) is not one that is directly associated with Mu‘tazilī doctrine, even if it might have been used, along with dozens of other verses, to prove a specific theological point. Secondly, the main controversy between the Mu‘tazilīs and other groups during this time and region was *not* over the issue of *qadr* but rather over the issue of God’s Attributes. This verse would have been too indirect a reference to the Mu‘tazilīs. Thirdly, there would have been far more effective and direct means of showing patronage (e.g., building schools, as was done for the Ash‘arī Ibn Fūrak) than minting a coin with an obscure, indirect reference, amongst a group of people who, by and large, would not have been able to read the inscription on the coin, much less associate it with a theological doctrine.

to the province of Ghūr, where they remained in power until the time of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). It is apparent that even after relocation, the Karrāmīs retained some political clout, since al-Rāzī, who had more than one public debate with them, was forced to relocate to another city after his harsh polemics led to some public unrest.<sup>1</sup> It was probably shortly thereafter that they simply withered away, leaving hardly a trace after three centuries in power. Significant for our purposes, however, is that even if the elite Karrāmī power base had been relocated, its supporters still retained a strong presence in Nishapur.

The theological group that is of most interest to us is, of course, the Ash‘arīs. Up until the fourth Islamic century, the Ash‘arīs had failed to take over any of the famous legal schools, and hence did not enjoy the legitimacy that the traditionalists enjoyed. However, the process of infiltration had begun, and the first school that was successfully taken over was the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab*.<sup>2</sup> As we enter the era that we are concerned with, it is essential to understand that the Ash‘aritization of the Shāfi‘ī school was still an ongoing process; while some Shāfi‘ī scholars were inclined to the Ash‘arī school, there were still major scholars of the *madhhab* who still clung to traditionalist theology.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Frank Griffel, “On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Life and the Patronage He Received,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18 (2007), pp. 335–37.

<sup>2</sup> G. Makdisi, “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arīs in Islamic Religious History I,” p. 46; W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, p. 28. Also see Makdisi’s comments on the intra-Shāfi‘ī struggle in his, “The non-Ash‘arite Shafī‘ism of Ghazzālī,” *Revue des études Islamiques* (1986), p. 248.

The earliest Ash‘arī to make his way to Nishapur appears to be Abū Sahl Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Šu‘lūkī (d. 369/979),<sup>1</sup> who travelled from Isfahan to Iraq in 322/933, where he studied with Abū al-Hasan al-Ash‘arī, and returned to Nishapur in 337/948. He appears to have won the approval of the Sāmānid court, for he was sent on a diplomatic mission to the neighboring Turks, and eventually taught for over three decades in Nishapur, teaching the subject of *kalām* every Saturday. Abū Sahl can be considered to be the true primogenitor of the Ash‘arī-Shāfi‘ī-Šūfic understanding of Islam that was to eventually dominate large sections of Muslim lands.<sup>2</sup>

His son, Abū al-Ṭayyib Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Šu‘lūkī (d. 403/1013) continued in his father’s intellectual line and became one of the most distinguished lecturers of Nishapur; it is said that five-hundred inkpots would be set out for the students who attended his class.<sup>3</sup> However, both of these theologians, even if they were influenced by Ash‘arī thought, do not appear to have specialized in *kalām*, nor do they appear to have written any original works in it.<sup>4</sup> During their eras, Ash‘arī thought does not appear to have seriously impacted the region, although it may be said that Sunnī *kalām* was introduced in Khurasān.

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<sup>1</sup> For these biographical details, see: *EI2*, s.v. ‘al-Šu‘lūkī’ (A. K. Reinhart); Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, pp. 183–5; R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, pp. 115–7

<sup>2</sup> We are not, here, concerned with the merging of Šūfic thought with Ash‘arī theology, hence this tangent will have to wait for future research. Also see: R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, pp. 116–7; T. Mayer, “Theology and Sufism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, pp. 258–87.

<sup>3</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 117; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 211

<sup>4</sup> In fact, if we are to believe one reference, Abū al-Ṭayyib might actually have abandoned *kalām* after the death of his father; see Abū Ismā‘īl al-Harawī, *Dhamm al-Kalām wa-ahlihī*, ed. Abdullāh b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī (Medina: Maktaba al-Ghurabā’ al-Athariyya, 1998), vol. 4, p. 406.

It is from Ibn Fūrak that the beginning of the intellectual Ash‘arī dominance in Nishapur can be traced. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. Fūrak (d. 406/1015)<sup>1</sup> was originally from Khurasān (or Isfahan), but travelled to the capital of Baghdad, where he was exposed to Ash‘arī thought through al-Ash‘arī’s student al-Bāhilī. He returned to Rayy, and began preaching the doctrines of the new school. Ibn Fūrak, in contrast to the previous Ash‘arīs mentioned, was a skilled theologian and scholarly *mutakallim*, and wrote a number of key works defending the school.<sup>2</sup> It can be assumed that his teachings caused an impact in the city, for local Karrāmī clerics began rousing the masses against him; one of them even held a mock-trial in his mosque, and then petitioned the Sultān regarding his heresies.<sup>3</sup> It appears that he was subjected to more than one trial as a result of his beliefs.<sup>4</sup> Seeing an opportunity, certain pro-Ash‘arī Shāfi‘ī elements of Nishapur (most likely the chief judge, al-Qāḍī al-Hīrī<sup>5</sup>) convinced the Simjūrid governor Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm (*rul.* 345-71/956-82) to invite him from Rayy to Nishapur.

<sup>1</sup> For his biography and thought, see: *EI2*, s.v. ‘Ibn Fūrak’ (W. Montgomery Watt); R Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, pp. 159-60; M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, “Early Islamic Theological and Juristic Terminology: *Kitāb al-Hudūd fi-l-uṣūl* by Ibn Fūrak” *BSOAS* vol. 54, no. 1 (1991), pp. 16-17; D. Gimaret, “Un document majeur pour l’histoire du kalām: le Muğarrad maqālāt al-Aš‘arī d’Ibn Fūrak,” *Arabica*, no. 32 (1985), pp. 185-218, 368; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, pp. 232-3. Ibn Fūrak’s *Muskhil al-hadīth* has extracts with German translation, see: Raimund Köbert, “Bayan *Muskil Ahadith Des Ibn Furak*,” *Analecta Orientalia*, vol. 22, Rome (1941).

<sup>2</sup> In particular, his *Muskhil al-hadīth wa-bayānihī*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mu’ṭī Qal’ajī (Syria: Dār al-Wā‘ī, 1982), in which he discusses and interprets problematic texts found in the Qur’ān and ḥadīth which might be understood anthropomorphically. It serves as a precursor to al-Rāzī’s *Ta’sīs*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 232-3.

<sup>4</sup> There is a reference to him having been transported, in chains, to Shīrāz at some point in his life, for a trial that he seems to have been vindicated in. See: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 233.

<sup>5</sup> When the post of the Qāḍī of Nishapur became vacant due to the death of the previous Ḥanafī judge in 351/963, the Simjūrids offered it to the Shāfi‘ī Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan, known as al-Qāḍī al-Hīrī (d. 421/1030). He had studied *kalām* with ‘...some of the students of Al-Ash‘arī;’ see: al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, vol. 4, pp. 6-7; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 17, pp. 356-8; R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 95.

The Simjūrid built a *madrasa* for Ibn Fūrak and gifted it to him. This *madrasa* was one of the earliest ever built in that region. It also appears to be the first *madrasa* established upon Ash‘arī thought, and helped secure, for the first time, an Ash‘arī foothold in Khurasān.<sup>1</sup> This must have occurred before the end of his governorship in 371/982.

Meanwhile, even in Nishapur, the teachings of the nascent school were challenged, and members of the Karrāmīs lodged yet another complaint against the ‘heresies’ of Ibn Fūrak in front of Sultān Maḥmūd. Ibn Fūrak was summoned to the court in Ghazna, where he successfully defended himself against charges of heresy, but died on the way back, apparently at the hands of Karrāmī assassins who poisoned him.<sup>2</sup>

Another major Ash‘arī figure of this era is Abū Ishāq Ibrahim b. Muḥammad al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027).<sup>3</sup> Along with Ibn Fūrak, the two are generally credited with establishing an Ash‘arī base in Nishapur (and, in fact, with tipping the scales of the Shāfi‘ī school away from traditionalist theology to Ash‘arī theology).<sup>4</sup> He too had studied in Baghdad under al-Bāhilī, and had befriended Ibn Fūrak there. It is, therefore, not inconceivable that Ibn Fūrak invited him to Nishapur; and there are references to a *madrasa* built for him as well.

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware of G. Makdisi’s claims, throughout his articles, that *madrasas* were primarily legal institutions devoid of any theological leanings. The evidence, however, seems to suggest otherwise, and this point will be elaborated upon throughout this section of the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> M. Malamud, “Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan,” p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> EI2, s.v. ‘al-Isfarāyīnī’ (W. Madelung); Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 243-244 (who states ‘and most of the scholars of Nishapur took *kalām* and *uṣūl* from him’); al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, vol. 4 pp. 256-62 . Note that many confuse him with another famous Ash‘arī of the region with the same *kunya*, who shall be mentioned later in this chapter, Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083).

<sup>4</sup> W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, p. 28.

In 428/1037, the Ghaznavids were forced to surrender Nishapur to the Turkish Seljuqs. The *khuṭba* began to be read in the name of the Seljuq sultan, Ṭughrul Beg. Although the Ghaznavids launched a counter-offensive and regained the city, they lost it again in 430/1039. The following year, in 431/1040, the Seljuqs would once and for all destroy the power of the Ghaznavid Empire in the great Battle of Dandanqān. The change of political power from the Ghaznavids to the Seljuqs was to have an immediate and decisive effect on the theological schools of Nishapur.

The Seljuq Sultān, Tuhgril Beg, understood the need to surround himself with trustworthy and loyal Persian ministers. He took into his counsel a senior Shāfi‘ī of the city, al-Muwaffaq al-Bistāmī (d. 440/1048),<sup>1</sup> and asked him to find a personal secretary, someone eloquent in Arabic. It was al-Bistāmī who introduced the Sultān to a student of his, an enigmatic ‘Imād al-Dīn Abū Naṣr Manṣūr al-Kundurī.<sup>2</sup> It was al-Kundurī who was to launch one of the most humiliating episodes in Ash‘arī history: the *mīḥna* of the Ash‘arīs of Nishapur.

#### 2.2.2. The *Mīḥna* of the Ash‘arīs

Al-Kundurī appears, by almost all later chroniclers, to be a total political failure (Makdisi calls him a ‘bungling fool’<sup>3</sup>). Be that as it may, and his vizier-capacities aside, what concerns us here is that sometime around 445/1053,<sup>4</sup> a public campaign against

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Muwaffaq will be discussed in more detail below, in the context of Niẓām al-Mulk’s teachers.

<sup>2</sup> For al-Kundurī, see: *EI2*, s.v. ‘al-Kundurī’ (G. Makdisi); R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> *EI2*, s.v. ‘al-Kundurī’ (G. Makdisi).

<sup>4</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, in his *Tabyīn*, dates the *mīḥna* from 440-450/1048-1058; Allard (p. 344), Bulliet, (“Nishapur in the Eleventh Century,” p. 82; *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 120) and Makdisi (“The Sunnī Revival”, p. 157) follow him. However, al-Qushayrī, who was an eyewitness to the happenings, dates the beginning of the *mīḥna* to 445/1053 (see:

heretics ('*Ahl al-bid'a*') began, which initially removed all those deemed to be heretics from official posts, and eventually culminated in cursing them from the pulpit. Some clerics were banished, others imprisoned. Public sentiment was also roused against them, and it appears that the political powers directly or indirectly allowed mobs to mobilize against them.<sup>1</sup> It was the Shī'is and the Ash'arīs who received the bulk of this negative attention.<sup>2</sup> That this campaign was al-Kundurī's doing is agreed upon by all historians; the question that remains unanswered is the level of participation and motivation of the Sultān Tughril Beg. Did the Sultān himself theologically agree to such a tactic, or was it a favor that he uncommittedly handed to his vizier, or even a tactic aimed at currying favor from the pro-Sunni/pro-Ḥanbalī Caliph in Baghdad? The texts remain silent on this issue, but it does seem unlikely that such a provocative stance, sure to invoke a backlash and outcry from the persecuted sects, could have been enacted unless the Sultān himself was so inclined.<sup>3</sup> And while some sources seek to exonerate Tughril Beg from any blame, assigning the anti-Ash'arī sentiment to al-Kundurī,<sup>4</sup> it is simply inconceivable that this witch-hunt lasted for such a long period without the Sultān himself supportive of the move in some fashion.<sup>5</sup>

al-Şubkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya*, v. 3, p. 401). It is very possible that Ibn 'Asākir, writing a century later, wished to prolong the period of the *mīḥna* in order to extract more sympathy for the Ash'arīs.

<sup>1</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> Madelung's contention that the Karrāmīs were also cursed (W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, p. 33) is clearly an error; none of the classical sources mention this, and we shall propose below that al-Kundurī himself was a Karrāmī.

<sup>3</sup> Makdisi is quite sure that Tughril Beg himself was anti-Ash'arī, and accuses him and al-Kundurī of being Mu'tazilī (see *idem.*, *The Sunni Revival*, p. 157). We shall discuss the theological affiliations of al-Kundurī –and, by extension, Tughril Beg – below.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 108. Such an exoneration could be explained as being politically motivated.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Kundurī did not, of course, act alone. Mention is also made of a certain Ḥanafī judge, Abū Naṣr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣā'idī (d. 482/1089) who was instrumental in inciting such tendencies. See: Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 19 p.

Eventually, probably towards the end of 445/1054, the four most prominent Ash‘arī theologians of the city were earmarked for arrest: Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1073),<sup>1</sup> Abū al-Faḍl Aḥmad al-Ra’īs al-Furātī,<sup>2</sup> Abū Sahl Muhammad b. Imām al-Muwaffaq (d. 456/1064),<sup>3</sup> and Abū al-Ma’alī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1086).<sup>4</sup> The first two were arrested, and disgracefully paraded through the streets in chains, after which they were locked in custody for over a month.<sup>5</sup> Al-Juwaynī, sensing the impending order, had taken the good precaution of disappearing from public sight; eventually, he made his way to Mecca via the city of Kirmān (it was this sojourn in Mecca and Medina that earned him the title of ‘Imām al-Haramayn’). Abū Sahl evaded capture as well, for he was in another province when the decree was released, and did not return to Nishapur because of it. Instead, he gathered together helpers and supporters, some of whom were fighters, and marched with his small militia to the

<sup>6</sup>; R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 209-10. The fact that it was a Ḥanafī judge also lends support to the Karrāmī connection, as many Karrāmīs were Ḥanafī by legal affiliation.

<sup>1</sup> He had married the daughter of the famous Ṣūfī mystic Abū ‘Alī al-Daqqāq, and studied under both Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfarāīnī. He made the journey to Mecca for the pilgrimage in the company of two other famous Ash‘arīs, al-Juwaynī and Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī. After Niẓām al-Mulk recalled the exiled Ash‘arīs, he seems to have been the oldest of them, and lived a somewhat quiet life in Nishapur until his death, leaving the leadership of the Ash‘arīs to al-Juwaynī. For his biography, see: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 271-5; R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 150-1; R. M Frank, “Two short dogmatic works of Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, Part 1: edition and translation of *Luma’ fi-l-‘itiqād*,” *MIDEO* 15 (1982), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> He had led the funeral prayer for the leader of the Karrāmiyya during the time of Maḥmūd of Ghazna. See: R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 68. I was not able to find a complete biography in the standard source works.

<sup>3</sup> Abū Sahl is the son of the famous Imam al-Muwaffaq, whom we shall mention in the context of Niẓām al-Mulk later. He was of the first theologians recalled back to Nishapur when Niẓām al-Mulk came to power; it was even said that he would be given a high position with the new government. However, it appears that he was poisoned to death, and died at the young age of thirty-three. See: R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 123; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 18, pp. 142-3.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Juwaynī was the single undisputed leader of the Ash‘arī-Shāfi‘ī faction of Nishapur during the reign of Niẓām al-Mulk. For over thirty years, he was given free reign to teach and preach in the city, having been handed the directorship of the first Niẓāmiyyah in Nishapur, and of the large Māni‘ī Mosque of the city. He was the primary teacher and mentor of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī. See: R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 125; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, pp. 278-84.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, v. 4, p. 210; R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 122

gates of the city, demanding the release of his fellow theologians. The mayor of the city fought back, but the forces of Abū Sahl charged on, and the battle became so fierce that it reached the city market-place, and the combatants began to run out of arrows. A truce was suggested, and it was agreed that the prisoners would be released if the forces of Abū Sahl withdrew.<sup>1</sup>

But Abū Sahl did not intend to quit the intellectual battle. He wished to make his way to the Sultān, and make a forceful and emotional appeal directly in his presence, to put a stop to al-Kundurī's purge. Instead, powerful friends of the vizier intervened, and Abū Sahl was thrown into prison, and his land and property (which was a considerable amount) confiscated.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, he was allowed to leave into exile, joining the dozens of other Ash'arī theologians who had also left Nishapur.<sup>3</sup>

The *mihna* lasted until 450/1058, when Alp Arsalān succeeded his father as the governor of Nishapur, and made Niẓām al-Mulk his vizier. Alp Arsalān had no sympathy for al-Kundurī;<sup>4</sup> he was initially imprisoned, and eventually executed in 456/1064.<sup>5</sup>

The expulsion of the Ash'arīs from Khurasān has been interpreted in many different ways. Al-Subkī, typically critical of any non-Ash'arī (especially one that would dare consider them heretics), accuses al-Kundurī, rather incredulously, of

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> This supports my previous argument that the Sultān could not have been a completely neutral observer to the ongoings.

<sup>3</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps because al-Kundurī had attempted to have Tughril Beg deposed and replaced by his son Anīshirwān; later, he had opposed the succession of Alp Arsalān. See Bulliet, "Nishapur in the Eleventh Century," p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> For details of this story, see Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fi-l-tārīkh*, v. 8, p. 190. The death was a rather gruesome one, with his body being dismembered and dispersed; not surprisingly, later Ash'arīs write with a sense of glee while narrating this, and see it as Divine wrath.

simultaneously being a Mu'tazilī, Karrāmī, Rāfidī, Qadarī and an anthropomorphist (*mujassim*).<sup>1</sup> Others, such as Makdisi, have read a theologically charged Mu'tazilī campaign against Ash'arīs.<sup>2</sup> Madelung suggests that it was an attempt of Ḥanafī domination over the rival Shāfi'i school, with the whole theological dimension merely a clever ploy.<sup>3</sup> Malamud claims that it was a tactic intended by the Sultān in order to curry the favor of the traditionalist 'Abbāsid Caliph in Baghdad, who would have appreciated any attempts to eradicate heterodoxical movements.<sup>4</sup> Bulliet, perhaps the foremost Western specialist of early Khurasanian politics, advances another interpretation. He claims that the *mīḥna* was a purely political move intended to destroy the domination of specific parties within Nishapur, via a 'divide-and-conquer' tactic; hence, it was neither inherently anti-Shāfi'i nor anti-Ash'arī in nature. Rather, al-Kundurī simply chose the Ash'arī-Shāfi'i faction as being heretical purely for logistical reasons, and had the circumstances been different, he might have persecuted the Ḥanafī-Karrāmīs instead.<sup>5</sup>

None of these explanations appears to be fully satisfactory. It appears that specific crucial evidences that would shed decisive light on these events have not been

<sup>1</sup> In fact, he even says, "...and we have never heard of anyone who had combined more filthy beliefs than him." See: *idem*, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya*, vol. 3, p. 390.

<sup>2</sup> He writes, "Al-Kundurī supported the Mu'tazilī movement, and was instrumental in having Ash'arī cursed from the pulpits of Khurāsān by the order of Tughril Beg. In Baghdād, he earned the hatred of the Sunnis by supporting the Shī'is," *EI2*, s.v. 'al-Kunduri' (G. Makdisi); for the specific incident that caused this wrath, see: G. Makdisi, "The Marriage of Tughril Beg," p. 271. Also see: G. Makdisi, "Ash'arī and the Ash'arīs in Islamic Religious History I," p. 47, where he claims that the 'Hanafī Mu'tazilīs' led this attack against the 'Shāfi'i Ash'arīs'.

<sup>3</sup> W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> M. Malamud, "Politics of Heresy in Medieval Khurasan," p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 71-2, and "Local Politics in Eastern Iran Under the Ghaznavids and Seljuqs," p. 50. A crucial factor, for Bulliet, is that al-Kundurī at one stage in his life studied with the Ash'arī al-Muwaffaq (see R. Bulliet, "Nishapur in the Eleventh Century," p. 81); however, during this stage we have plenty of examples of students from one theological school studying with those of others, without adopting that school's position.

taken into account. The first of these is a letter that was written as a result of this *mīḥna* by one of the affected parties himself, al-Qushayrī. The second is a letter by the famous ḥadīth scholar Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) addressed to the Sultān. And the third involves the role (or lack thereof) played by a certain Abū ‘Uthmān al-Ṣābūnī (d. 449/1057). Based upon these crucial pieces of the puzzle, it becomes clear that the persecution of the Ash‘arīs (and the other theological groups) was in fact primarily a *theologically* motivated purge that was led by a Karrāmī faction headed by al-Kundurī, and while al-Kundurī, being a Ḥanafī,<sup>1</sup> wished to give his own *legal* school some advantage, he did not target the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab* *qua* legal *madhhab*. Traditionalists (i.e., those of ‘Hanbali’ theology), regardless of their legal *madhhabs*, were considered within the acceptable spectrum of Sunnī Islam, hence were not targeted.<sup>2</sup>

The first evidence involves the contents of the epistle written by ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, of *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyya* fame. Al-Qushayrī wrote a letter entitled *Shikāya Ahl al-Sunna bi-ḥikāya mā-nālahum min al-mīḥna* (“The Complaint of *Ahl al-Sunna* by Narrating the *Mīḥna* that was Meted Out to Them”), in which he hoped to garner support for the Ash‘arīs against the perpetrators of this Inquisition. This letter was written in 446/1054, a year after the *mīḥna* started. Therefore, we can assume that the letter would pinpoint the guilty culprit in unabashed detail. It has been preserved by al-

<sup>1</sup> Earlier, the relationship between the Ḥanafī school and Karrāmī beliefs was shown; additionally, even al-Maqdisi pointed this out in the fourth/ninth century, see C. E. Bosworth, “The Rise of the Karāmiyyah,” p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Karrāmīs and traditionalists has not been fully explored. Theologically, the main point of contention between these two schools is over the definition of *īmān*: for the latter, it consists solely of verbally acknowledging the testimony of faith, whereas for the former it consists of belief, statements and actions. Most importantly, both groups are equally opposed to the use of *kalām*, and have strikingly similar positions regarding understanding God’s Attributes and pre-destination. It is because of this similarity that I posit that each of the two groups grudgingly allowed the other to co-exist, and joined hands in opposition to other, more ‘heretical’, movements, such as the Shi‘īs and Ash‘arīs.

Subkī in its entirety.<sup>1</sup> It must be kept in mind here that the Caliph (and, by extension, most of the masses) were sympathetic to traditionalist theology. There were, of course, clear tensions simmering between the traditionalists and Ash‘arīs, but no major confrontation between them had yet occurred. The Ash‘arīs, since the days of al-Ash‘arī, had been trying to ingratiate themselves with the traditionalist school and claim equal footing in ‘Sunnism’. Hence, al-Qushayrī’s letter is being written in order to garner traditionalist (i.e., Ḥanbalī) support for the Ash‘arīs against the Karrāmīs.

Al-Qushayrī’s letter begins with a laudatory passage describing al-Ash‘arī as one who revived the *sunna* and fought innovation, especially the Mu‘tazilī heresy; in fact, al-Qushayrī mentions, the very last breath of al-Ash‘arī was used in invoking God’s curse on them.<sup>2</sup> Then, al-Qushayrī mentions how he attempted to defend the Ash‘arīs in front of some unspecified person of power, and proved that *both groups* (*‘al-fariqayn’*) were striving to suppress Mu‘tazilīs and other heretics; in fact, they were as one against them.<sup>3</sup> Writes al-Qushayrī, “...for indeed, the books of al-Ash‘arī are widely spread over all lands, and his doctrines are well-known to *both schools of Ahl al-Sunna*.<sup>4</sup>”

This introduction shows that the *mīḥna* could not possibly have been introduced by pro-Mu‘tazilī elements, but rather by pro-Sunnī anti-*kalām* elements. Al-Qushayrī clearly wants sympathy from one Sunnī group, and wishes to include his own Ash‘arī

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Šubkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya*, v. 3, pp. 399-423; he explains this by saying, ‘...and we shall reproduce it in its entirety, since [epistles] similar to it are easily lost as time goes on, for such is the fate such booklets.’ Some of it is also preserved in Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, pp. 110-2.

<sup>2</sup> al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, v. 3, p. 402.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 405.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 406. Emphasis mine. The ‘two schools’ refer, of course, to the traditionalist and the Ash‘arīs.

school as being a sister-group to this one. The letter was supposed to show al-Ash'arī as being within orthodoxy, and hence praised him for his *anti-Mu'tazilī* stances.

If this is not clear yet, the remaining sections of the letter leave no doubt. Al-Qushayrī introduces several specific theological doctrines that the Ash'arīs were accused of, and then defends the Ash'arī position regarding those doctrines. In particular, al-Qushayrī mentions that the Ash'arīs have been accused of believing:

- 1) that the Prophet is no longer a prophet after his death;<sup>1</sup>
- 2) that God does not actually punish a sinner for his evil or reward a righteous person for his piety;<sup>2</sup>
- 3) that Moses did not actually hear the speech of God<sup>3</sup> and that the Qur'ān that is preserved 'between the two covers' is not the actual speech of God;<sup>4</sup>
- 4) that the average follower who simply imitates what others believe (*al-muqallid*) is not a Muslim;<sup>5</sup>
- 5) that studying *kalām* is an evil innovation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 411. The claim was that since the Ash'arīs posit 'accidents' that need to be continuously re-created, and since 'prophethood' is one such accident, and since the Prophet is now not 'alive', this would imply that the accident of prophecy has been removed from him. Al-Quashyri, in his epistle, responds to this charge by claiming that prophets are indeed alive.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 413. This is an obvious reference to the doctrine of 'acquisition' or *kasb*, which states that man only 'acquires' the result of his action, either punishment or reward, despite the fact that man's own will and volition plays no role in the execution of that action.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 416

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 417. Both of these points go back to the Ash'arī conception of God's speech as being an 'internal speech' that is not composed of words or letters and cannot be heard by men.

<sup>5</sup> This issue is related to the doctrine of 'reasoned belief', which was held by some later Ash'arīs but rejected by most of them. The question at stake is: is one required to know the logical proofs for the veracity of one's beliefs, or is mere blind-faith and imitation (i.e., following the religion of one's parents and society) sufficient?

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 421.

These charges against the Ash‘arīs could not possibly have emanated from a Mu‘tazilī, or else this would have been a classic kettle-pot scenario! The Mu‘tazilīs themselves believed that the Qur‘ān as it exists in this world is not the actual Speech of God (they claim it is created and merely ascribed to God as the One who Originated it); they believed that God’s Speech could not be heard (rather, Moses heard a created speech, not God’s speech); and they too believed that sound faith must be based on rational evidence, and not mere imitation (*taqlīd*). The last point regarding *kalām* is self-explanatory. It is patently clear that such charges could only have emanated from either the traditionalist or Karrāmī camp – both of which were anti-*kalām* in their theologies.

However, al-Qushayrī’s anger and angst was directed against one of these two camps. In one place, when he poses the question of who could possibly have invented such lies against al-Ash‘arī, he states, “Some of the Karrāmīs – may God fill his grave with fire, and I think God will indeed do so...!”<sup>1</sup> In another place, he claims that a tactic of assuming the worst and reading in an incorrect meaning “...is from the familiar tactics of the Karrāmīs.”<sup>2</sup> Very pointedly, when he discussed the one theological issue that each of the three groups would differ upon, (the issue of faith, or *īmān*), he severely criticizes the Karrāmī position on faith, then mentions and glosses over the traditionalist position, and finally concludes with the Ash‘arī position (viz., that faith is solely belief, or *taṣdīq*).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 418.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 3, p. 419.

This epistle, therefore, leaves absolutely no room for doubt that the *mīḥna* was a Karrāmī-led one. Al-Qushayrī's letter was an attempt to garner traditionalist support against the Karrāmīs in their expulsion of the Ash'arīs and their accusations of heresy against them.

To further buttress this point, we now turn to our second evidence. The famous scholar Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī had written a letter to the Sultān, urging him to correct this egregious error of his minister, claiming that one particular group (viz., the Ash'arīs) were unjustly included. Al-Bayhaqī argues passionately, "...they are from *Ahl al-Sunna*; they do not go to the extremes of the Mu'tazilīs in denying the attributes, nor the extremes of the anthropomorphists in assuming them to be human-like."<sup>1</sup> It would be inconceivable, if the expulsion were Mu'tazilī-led, that al-Bayhaqī could be so overtly critical of them; al-Bayhaqī wished to garner support from the Sultān (just as al-Qushayrī sought to do from the masses) by claiming that the Ash'arīs are *not* like the Mu'tazilīs, hence deserved to be equal 'Sunnis' along with the traditionalists.

These two evidences clearly show that Mu'tazilīs had no role in the expulsion of the Ash'arīs in Nishapur. But what of our claim that this *mīḥna* was not a politically motivated purge as much as it was a theological one? The evidence above only demonstrates that the Karrāmī al-Kundurī was using specific theological doctrines to oppose the Ash'arīs; it does not rule out the possibility that these doctrines were merely being used as excuses for a more political agenda. In order to further refine this point and arrive at our stated conclusion, we need to turn to the third piece of evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*, vol. 3, p. 296; Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatāwā al-Kubrā*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥakīm (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d.), vol. 6, p. 433.

The third evidence centers around the fact that the traditionalist scholars in Nishapur, even if they were Shāfi‘ī in *madhab*, were not targeted *qua* legal *madhab*. As a whole, the *Ahl al-Hadīth* were not ordered to be cursed from the pulpits, nor does any theologian of that inclination appear to have been harmed. A key figure in Nishapur, perhaps even the senior-most religious figure of the city, best illustrates this point: the official ‘Shaykh al-Islām’,<sup>1</sup> a teacher for over seventy years, and the *khatib* of the main mosque for over twenty years, Abū ‘Uthmān Isma‘il b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Ṣābūnī (d. 449/1057).<sup>2</sup> He had biological ties with famous Shāfi‘īs and Ḥanbalīs of previous generations, and had studied under both traditionalist and Ash‘arī authorities.<sup>3</sup>

While most earlier writers have considered him to be of the Ash‘arī-Shāfi‘ī faction,<sup>4</sup> his extant work on theology clearly belies this claim. The ‘*Aqīda al-salaf aṣḥāb al-hadīth*’ (‘The Creed of the Early Generations, the People of Hadīth’)<sup>5</sup> is a typical traditionalist theological treatise that is clearly intended as a critique of Ash‘arism, even though the group is not mentioned by name. Al-Ṣābūnī squarely places himself in

<sup>1</sup> R. Bulliet has discussed the connotation and function of this title in his “The Shaikh Al-Islām and the Evolution of Islamic Society,” p. 53–67. He points out that this term was introduced in Khurasan in the tenth century, and that the role of a ‘Shaykh al-Islam’ was to be a guarantor of the academic credentials of other teachers and *khatib*s; the highest academic and spiritual arbiter of the area. In other words, as Bulliet writes, ‘To say a man was Shaykh al-Islām was to say it all’ (p. 61).

<sup>2</sup> See: R. Bulliet, “Local Politics in Eastern Iran Under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks”, p. 46; *idem.*, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 117; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya*, v. 4, pp. 271–92.

<sup>3</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 134. His paternal grandfather was a student of Ahmad b. Ḥanbal and a leading traditionalist of Herat; see: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 13, p. 570.

<sup>4</sup> Such as Al-Subkī, in his entry on him in the *Ṭabaqāt*, v. 4, p. 271. The conclusion of the entry is a lengthy last will and testament that is clearly *Ahl al-Hadīth* in its theology; it explicitly criticizes all study of *kalām* and affirms ‘problematic’ Divine Attributes – as is typical, al-Subkī does not comment on its contents; see *idem.*, vol. 4, p. 285–9.

Bulliet also considers him an Ash‘arī-Shāfi‘ī in his “Nishapur in the Eleventh Century”, p. 79, pp. 84–5, and *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> The work has another title as well, *al-Risālah fī i‘tiqād Ahl al-Sunna*, and the edited print has both titles on the cover page; *idem.*, ed. Badr b. Abdillah al-Badr (Medina: Maktabah al-Ghurabā’ al-Athariyyah, 1994).

the traditionalist-Shāfi‘ī camp (with frequent quotations from Ibn Khuzayma) and defends the doctrines of the ‘Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth,’ which he self-identifies with, against those who accuse them of being ‘hashwiyya’ and ‘mushabbiha’.<sup>1</sup> He also takes great pains to point out that even the great founders of the legal schools, al-Shāfi‘ī, Abū Ḥanīfa and Mālik, all agreed with traditionalist theology and shunned the use of *kalām*.<sup>2</sup> Rather pointedly, when the discussion turns to the touchy subject of *īmān*,<sup>3</sup> he defines faith as comprising of belief and actions, but does not at all address the issue of those who claim that faith is only manifested on the tongue (*viz.*, the Karrāmīs). For a work that scathingly criticizes all the other groups present in Khurasān at the time, the resounding silence against refuting the Karrāmīs is revealing. One final point of interest, which probably shows that al-Ṣābūnī’s work was written around the time of the Inquisition, is the section in which a long list of luminaries are mentioned, all of whom agreed upon “...overpowering all heretics, and humiliating them, debasing them, exiling them (*iqlā’ihim*) and avoiding interacting with them... and in fact considering [such] a deed beloved to God.”<sup>4</sup>

Al-Ṣābūnī is thus clearly from the traditionalist school in theology, and Shāfi‘ī in *madhhab*. He, therefore, can serve as a litmus test to see whether the *mīḥna* was against a theology, or against a *madhhab*.

<sup>1</sup> Al-Ṣābūnī, ‘Aqīda al-salaf aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 42, 59, 64.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82-4. Also see his *Waṣīyya*, in al-Subkī’s *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 4, p. 287.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123. This also suggests, quite pointedly, that while the traditionalists were not the ones who instigated the *mīḥna*, they most certainly did not prevent it, and perhaps might even have been tacitly supportive of it.

During the Ash‘arī *miḥna*, we discover that while al-Şābūnī was excused from his post as *khaṭīb*, and was replaced with a Ḥanafī *khaṭīb*, that was the sole effect of the persecution on him.<sup>1</sup> He was not exiled, jailed, or even threatened. Rather, he appears to have gone about his daily life normally, *sans* the *khaṭīb* post, even teaching his regular weekly classes. His immunity from the persecution that affected all of the other Ash‘arīs in the city is significant indeed, and has caused some speculation amongst modern researchers.<sup>2</sup> There is no question that someone as prestigious as al-Şābūnī could not have been accidentally overlooked. The only answer to this is that the *miḥna* was targeting Ash‘arīs, and not Shāfi‘īs.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to speculate the possible implications for Islamic intellectual history had al-Kundurī’s policies been allowed to continue. Conceivably, the Ash‘arīs might have been relegated to a footnote in Islamic history, and they might have gone the way of many earlier sects, such as the Karrāmīs themselves, and most of the Khārijī groups. At least in Nishapur, the State would have succeeded where al-Ma’mūn had earlier failed, and it would have taken control of religious authority.<sup>4</sup>

After al-Kundurī’s dismissal, the empty slot of vizier was eventually filled by an individual who would set in place the single most significant change that ever affected

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 108; R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 137. In another place, Bulliet suggests he resigned, but this claim does not appear to be verified in the classical sources; *idem.*, *Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Bulliet writes, “Curiously, the fate that overcame [the other Ash‘arīs] passed over Abu ‘Uthmān al-Şābūnī, even though he was a central figure in the edifice of Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī power...this immunity from harm is peculiar indeed.” See: *idem.*, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> The question can be asked: why then was he even removed from his preaching position? The only possible explanation was that, as a Shāfi‘ī, he was simply replaced with a Ḥanafī, not because of his theological inclinations, but rather because of his legal affiliations. Even if al-Kundurī might not have considered him heretical, he still preferred his legal school over the rival Shāfi‘ī school.

<sup>4</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 72.

the political power of the Ash‘arī school: Niẓām al-Mulk. Al-Kundurī’s excessive harshness against the Ash‘arīs would generate a reaction from Niẓām al-Mulk that would propel the Ash‘arīs to a level of unprecedented fame and state-power – one that they took advantage of over the course of the next eight centuries.

### 2.2.3 The Role of Niẓām al-Mulk

Al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī b. Ishāq al-Ṭūṣī, or ‘Niẓām al-Mulk’, was born in the district of Ṭūs around 409/1018.<sup>1</sup> Due to political strife in the region, his father fled to Ghazna during the last years of Ghaznavid rule, where he, along with his siblings, was enrolled in the local *madrasa*. The seeds of Islamic scholarship were deeply planted in him. Even though he did not pursue an academic career in Islam (unlike his brother, who became a famous juriconsult of the Shāfi‘ī school), he did become an ardent champion for the school that he became attached to: the Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī school. This personal attachment would be allowed to manifest itself at a national level and, quite literally, change the course of Islamic intellectual history.

The exposure of Niẓām al-Mulk to Ash‘arī doctrines is an interesting story.<sup>2</sup> The quasi-autobiography of Niẓām al-Mulk, the *Pand-nāma*<sup>3</sup> mentions that after he had completed his primary studies in Ṭūs (which consisted of memorizing the Qur’ān and

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<sup>1</sup> For Niẓām al-Mulk, see: EI2, s.v. ‘Niẓām al- Mulk’ (H. Bowen, [C.E. Bosworth]), A. K. S. Lambton, “The Dilemma of Government in Islamic Persia: the Siyāsat-Nāma of Niẓām al-Mulk,” p. 55-8; ‘Abd al-Hādī Riqā Maḥbūba, *Niẓām al-Mulk: Kabīr al-Wuzarā’ fī-l-umma al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Maṣriyya al-Lubnāniyya, 1998), pp. 233-46.

<sup>2</sup> That Niẓām al-Mulk himself was an Ash‘arī can hardly be debated; all his biographers point this out. See, for example: al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 19, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> This work is also called *al-Waṣaya*; it was printed in Hyderabad in 1305/1887, but I have not been able to obtain a copy. It appears to be an account of the stories of the family of Niẓām and his descendants after him, compiled by a later family member from ancestral records and family stories. This reference was used extensively by ‘Abd al-Hādī Maḥbūba in his work *Niẓām al-Mulk*, which remains the most extensive biographical work on the vizier. My own quotations from the *al-Waṣaya* are taken from it. For more details of this work and its printing, see: A. Maḥbūba, *Niẓām al-Mulk*, p. 240.

studying basic *fiqh*), he went to the neighboring city of Nishapur, where he spent the next few years (most likely 429-434/1037-1042),<sup>1</sup> in the prime of his youth, studying with a certain al-Muwaffaq Hibatullāh, whom he described as, "...of the greatest sages of Khurasān, and a blessed and respected man...and it was said that all who studied with him would aspire to high positions and power."<sup>2</sup> Clearly, Niẓām al-Mulk was taken in by this scholar and considered him a primary reason for his success. But who was this al-Muwaffaq?

His full name is Hibatullāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Husayn al-Bistāmī (d. 440/1048),<sup>3</sup> and he is typically glossed over because of the fame of his father, known as al-Qādī Abū ‘Umar Muḥammad al-Bistāmī (d. 408/1017),<sup>4</sup> a Shāfi‘ī scholar who visited the Caliph al-Qādir (*reg.* 381-422/991-1031) in Baghdad as an envoy of the Sultān. Abū ‘Umar (i.e., the father of al-Muwaffaq) was a strong proponent of the traditionalists,<sup>5</sup> and the Caliph and his entourage were apparently so taken in with his eloquence and ways that they appointed him the Qādī of Nishapur in 388/998. It was during one of these trips to Baghdad that he met Abū Ḥāmid al-Isfarā’īnī and was first exposed to Ash‘arī thought. While it is difficult to conceive of his own conversion to the school, especially under the pro-Ḥanbalī Caliph who had appointed him, he does seem to have been impressed with

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<sup>1</sup> A. Maḥbūba, *Niẓām al-Mulk*, p. 243

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Waṣāya*, p. 29, from A. Maḥbūba, *Niẓām al-Mulk*, p. 487-90.

<sup>3</sup> His biography is hardly mentioned in the standard sources; he has an entry in al-Subkī’s *Tabaqāt* (v. 5, p. 354), but no biographical details are mentioned other than the full *nasab*. The editor graciously supplies us with these details, in a footnote on the same page, taken from *Tabaqāt al-Wustā*. R. Bulliet, in his *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 118-9, has an entry on him, but does not link him with Niẓām al-Mulk.

<sup>4</sup> For his biography, see: Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 236-38; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 17, p. 320.

<sup>5</sup> His biographers (see above) note how happy the *Ahl al-Hadīth* were at the announcement of his judiciary appointment, viewing it as a victory for their theology.

the teachings of this new group. He proposed to the daughter of the famous Ash‘arī theologian Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Ṣu'lūkī (whom we have already mentioned), and it was this marriage that resulted in the birth of al-Muwaffaq.

Al-Muwaffaq studied with his maternal grandfather, Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Ṣu'lūkī, and also with Abū Ishaq al-Isfarāīnī, both being significant theologians of the Ash‘arī school. Al-Muwaffaq eventually became the leading Shāfi‘ī juriconsort of Nishapur, and was so well venerated by the Seljuqs when they came to power that he was consulted by them in choosing able ministers (ironically, it was he who referred them to al-Kundurī, who was to later turn against the Ash‘arīs).<sup>1</sup> And it was al-Muwaffaq’s son, Abū Sahl Muḥammad, who was one of the four Ash‘arīs who were targeted specifically by name during the *mīhna* of 445/1053, and who led the armed revolt to free some of his fellow theologians from jail. This was how Niẓām al-Mulk himself became connected with the Ash‘arī school and championed its cause for the rest of his life.

Niẓām al-Mulk worked his way up in the administration, working first for the Ghaznavids, then the Seljuq ‘āmid, and finally with Alp Arslān, prince of the empire and nephew of Tughril Beg, the Seljuq Sultān. In 447/1055, Tughril Beg entered Baghdad, at the behest of the ‘Abbāsid Caliph al-Qā’im (*reg. 422-67/1031-75*). This was a critical moment, both in Islamic political and intellectual history. The new Turkish Caliphate would, as expected, rid the city of as much Buwayhid Shī‘ī influence as possible. In the process, they would have the opportunity to support any school of thought that they felt was most expedient. It was this opportunity that, eventually, Niẓām al-Mulk would avail himself to.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 119.

In 450/1059, Alp Arsalan became the governor of Khurasān, and made Niẓām al-Mulk, who had already displayed his intellectual genius and political acumen, his *vazīr*. As Alp Arsalan grew in power, so did Niẓām al-Mulk, and when Tughril Beg died childless, Alp Arsalan became the Grand Sultān of the Seljuq Empire in 455/1064. Niẓām al-Mulk was appointed the vizier, and he remained in this position for almost thirty years, until his assassination by the Ismaīlīs in 485/1092. In effect, Niẓām al-Mulk now had the power of the state at his disposal.

The effects of Niẓām al-Mulk in all affairs of the State were profound indeed; for the purpose of our line of research, he utilized his resources to supplant and counteract the influence of Shī‘ī thought that the Buwayhids had introduced with Sunnī thought. However, it was not traditionalist Sunnism that he supported, but rather Ash‘arī Sunnism.

Niẓām al-Mulk was an ardent believer of the role of religion in political life. For Niẓām al-Mulk, the state had a two-fold basis: promoting authentic religion, and upholding justice. He wrote in his treatise on right governorship:<sup>1</sup>

What a ruler needs most is right religion, because kingship and religion are like two brothers: whenever any disturbance arises in the kingdom, disorder also occurs in religion, and malefactors appear. Whenever there is disorder in the affairs of religion, the kingdom is disturbed and the power of malefactors increases, and they cause rulers to lose their dignity and make them troubled at heart; heresies (innovations) are openly proclaimed and rebels become powerful.

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<sup>1</sup> A. K. S. Lambton, “The Dilemma of Government in Islamic Persia: the *Siyāsat-Nāma* of Niẓām al-Mulk,” p. 55.

Niżām al-Mulk was clearly no modern-day liberal: he believed that the State should promote true religion and suppress all heresies. It is not possible to dissociate this basic sociological worldview that Niżām held from the actions that he did, and in particular the single most effective unified educational project ever launched since the beginning of Islam: the Nizāmiyya schools. Due to the significance these events have in shaping our understanding of the function of the Niżāmiyyah and the rise of Ash‘arī thought, these events will be summarized, in some detail, below.

Niżām al-Mulk was, of course, very familiar with the traditionalist–Ash‘arī debate, as he had witnessed it first-hand, being from Khurasān. He was obviously well-aware of all that had transpired during al-Kundurī’s purge, and could not help but to have felt especially hurt when his own school, and even his own teacher’s son, Abū Sahl b. Muḥammad, was targeted.<sup>1</sup> It is not too much of a stretch to posit a personal friendship between these two men dating back to the time that Niżām al-Mulk had studied with his father.

Within a year of Alp Arsalān becoming governor of Nishapur, Niżām al-Mulk established the very first of a series of prestigious *madrasas*, all of which would be called after him (*viz.*, the Niżāmiyyas). The concept of a *madrasa* was not new: the Iranians were of the earliest people to introduce small schools to teach people of all ages about Islam. Some of these schools concentrated on a legal *madhab*, whereas others were

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<sup>1</sup> Even Ibn ‘Asākir, one of the most ardent defenders of the school, cannot help to note that this event caused Niżām al-Mulk to overcompensate the Ash‘arīs when he came to power; see *idem.*, *Tabyīn*, p. 108.

dedicated to Qur'ānic or ḥadīth studies. The Karrāmīs are reputed to have had three such *madrasas*,<sup>1</sup> but, by and large, they remained small, private phenomena.

Through the Niẓāmiyya, Niẓām al-Mulk was able to revolutionize the entire educational system: firstly, by the sheer scale of the colleges; secondly, by financing the students to study there; thirdly, by introducing the concept of multiple professors to teach different subjects; and, lastly, by standardizing the curriculum and building a network of similar institutions in several major Islamic cities. The vizier personally oversaw and financed, through state funds, a number of Niẓāmiyya Colleges in most of the cities under Seljuq control.

The first Niẓāmiyya, of Nishapur, was most likely built by 450/1059,<sup>2</sup> and was handed over to none other than al-Juwainī, who had been recalled from exile by Niẓām al-Mulk. The fact that the Niẓāmiyya was built the very same year that Alp Arsalān installed Niẓām as the vizier clearly suggests that Niẓām al-Mulk had been thinking about such a project for some time. Al-Juwainī continued to teach at this Niẓāmiyya, uninterrupted, for a period of over thirty years, graduating batches after batches of Ash'arī luminaries. Additionally, he was given the position of *khaṭīb* of one of the largest mosques in Nishapur, the Māniī mosque.

When Alp Arsalan became the Grand Sultān, and Niẓām al-Mulk had access to the Muslim capital, he wasted no time in building what was to quickly become the most famous of these colleges: the Niẓāmiyya of Baghdad. The construction of the Niẓāmiyya

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<sup>1</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

of Baghdad began in 457/1065, and was inaugurated in 459/1067.<sup>1</sup> This College can be considered the *first* proto-University in the Arab world.<sup>2</sup> But these two Niẓāmiyyas were not the only planned. At least seven others were also built: in Balkh, Herat, Isfahan, Basra, Marw, Amul and Mosul.<sup>3</sup> These are the nine that we know of, and it is probable that more were built (or perhaps smaller versions of the Niẓāmiyyas, privately and locally sponsored, began cropping up in various other cities).

Niẓām al-Mulk also instituted the custom of paying students at the College a stipend, and it appears this was a novel idea introduced by him.<sup>4</sup> Professors of all the various colleges were also financially taken care of. Previous, smaller *madrassas* many times lacked the endowments to provide reasonable salaries to professors, and many had to resort to other jobs to sustain themselves.<sup>5</sup> All of this resulted in the fact that the study of law committed the student to a financially dismal future: he would have to live in extremely rough conditions, only to ‘graduate’ and seek some type of teaching post that might pay a portion of his requirements, while scrounging for other work on the side, such as copying, selling books, or trading goods.<sup>6</sup> But the institution of the state-wide madrasa radically changed all of that. Students were taken care of, and could study in peace. After graduation, if they excelled, they could look forward to teaching posts in their own College, or find another Niẓāmiyya that needed such positions. As a teacher,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaṣam*, vol. 9, p. 459.

<sup>2</sup> Of course, al-Azhar University preceded it, having been founded around 369/970, by the Fāṭimids.

<sup>3</sup> G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, v. 19, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50-1.

their generous stipend freed them from the needs of worrying about income. Thus, the whole enterprise of scholarship was taken to an unprecedented level, and with it, guaranteed the dominance of the Shāfi‘ī school of law, and, most importantly for our case, Ash‘arī theology. In building this network, Niẓām al-Mulk sought to harness the great potential of power which resided in controlling the masses through the ‘ulamā’.<sup>1</sup>

Niẓām al-Mulk personally oversaw all appointments into the Colleges, and he had ultimate authority and full control over the professorships of the Niẓāmiyya. It is clear that this school had personal significance for him, and was not an attempt to curry the favor of the Sultān, for all professors would be from his own Shāfi‘ī school (and, crucial for our purposes, Ash‘arī theology) rather than the Ḥanafī school favored by the Seljuqs.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Niẓām al-Mulk even attempted to keep control of these institutions amongst his sons after him.<sup>3</sup>

That Niẓām al-Mulk was finally able to establish a Niẓāmiyya in the center of Arab lands and the capital of the Muslim world was a feat in itself; however, the mere construction and operation of the institute would not be enough to spread Ash‘arism. There would be quite a struggle, and the new teachings would face much opposition before finally being adopted by the State and co-opted into a ‘Sunnī Orthodoxy’.

#### 2.2.4 Back in Baghdad

As the Ash‘arī creed developed in the north-eastern lands of Persia, in the capital of Baghdad, traditionalist Sunnism remained status quo. It is true that Shī‘ī factions

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> G. Makdisi, “Madrasa and University in the Middle Ages,” p. 263.

<sup>3</sup> G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 16.

dominated the political world of the time; the Buwayhids were in power in Baghdad, and the office of the Caliph became a mere technical formality to rubberstamp policy. Concurrent to Buwayhid rule in Baghdad, the Zaydī Ḥamdānids were well established in Aleppo and Mosul, and the two Ismaīlī sects of the Qarāmiṭa and Fāṭimids were established in Bahrain and N. Africa, respectively. The Buwayhids had ruled from 334/946 to 447/1056, and while Twelver Shi‘ī thought was codified and, to an extent, flourished in their reign, they realized the futility of trying to forcefully impose it amongst the masses.

All of this was at a political level. On the local level, the Sunnī population of Baghdad remained mostly on traditionalist thought, primarily following one of the legal schools of the Shāfi‘īs, Ḥanbalīs, and Mālikīs. There were, of course, a handful of Ash‘arīs in Baghdad, the most famous one being Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), who had accompanied the Buwayhid *amīr* ‘Adud al-Dawla to Baghdad when the court moved there from Shiraz in 364/975.<sup>1</sup> Al-Bāqillānī had studied Ash‘arī thought under Ibn Mujāhid al-Tāī (d. 370/980), who was one of the few disciples of al-Ash‘arī himself. There were others as well, but by all accounts the school remained small.<sup>2</sup> And while traditionalist Ḥanbalism had a number of mosque-schools (i.e., *jāmi‘*), the Ash‘arīs did not yet have a public post in any mosque.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M Allard, *Le probleme*, p. 291; Y. Ibibsh, *Political Doctrine*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Y. Ibibsh is only able to list less than two dozen students of al-Bāqillānī, many of whom (e.g., al-Harawī) were not actually Ash‘arī or remained in Baghdad; *idem.*, *The Political Doctrines of al-Baqillani*, pp. 18-9.

<sup>3</sup> In Baghad, the primary such mosque-madrasas were: Jāmi‘ al-Mansūr, Jāmi‘ al-Mahdī, and Jāmi‘ al-Qaṣr. All three of the teaching posts in these schools were taken by the Ḥanbalīs, such as Ibn al-Bannā’ (d. 471/1079), Ibn ‘Aqīl (d. 512/1119), Abū Muḥammad al-Tamīmī (d. 488/1095) and al-Sharīf Abū Ja‘far (d. 470/1077). There were, of course, institutions of the other schools of law, but these were much smaller. See: G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 5, pp. 19-26.

That is not to say that Ash‘arī teachings did not represent a threat to traditionalism. The propagation of the Qādirī creed clearly showed the rising threat felt by the traditionalists. The Qādirī creed, named after the Caliph al-Qādir (reg. 381-422/991-1031) was a short creed that was read aloud, in ceremony, a number of times between 408/1017 to 430/1038. The creed was a direct assault on both Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī doctrine, probably aiming to quell the influence of the Mu‘tazilī Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār and the Ash‘arī ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1038).<sup>1</sup> Makdisi writes of this creed that it was distinctly anti-Shī‘ī, anti-Mu‘tazilī and anti-Ash‘arī.<sup>2</sup> The Qādirī creed shows, *inter alia*, that at the beginning of the fifth Islamic century, traditionalist theology was the one supported by the Caliphate, and the one that was most dominant amongst the masses. Therefore, the introduction of Ash‘arī thought via the Niẓāmiyya, at such a public level in Baghdad, could not be expected to occur without a severe backlash. In fact, that is precisely what happened, beginning with the very inauguration of the Niẓāmiyya.

The inauguration of the Niẓāmiyya College of Baghdad was a major event.<sup>3</sup> It took place on the day of the great celebration of the ‘Eid of Sacrifice’, being a Saturday, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Dhū-l-Hijja, 459 AH (22 September, 1067). The noblemen of the city were invited, and a great ceremony was planned, in which the Ash‘arī-Shāfi‘ī scholar, Abū Ishāq al-

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, *Ibn‘ Aqīl*, p. 8-10. Makdisi also discusses the reception of this creed in Western scholarship, pp. 12-16.

<sup>2</sup> G. Makdisi, “The Sunnī Revival,” in *Islamic Civilization 950-1150*, ed. Donald S. Richard (Oxford: Cassirer, 1973), p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, in his *al-Muntażam* (vol. 9, pp. 469-70) provides the most detailed account of this incident; also see A. Talas, *La Madrasa Nizamiya et son histoire*, p. 26.

Shirāzī (d. 476/1083),<sup>1</sup> would be given the professorial chair. Niẓām al-Mulk had already offered the position to him, and he had accepted. However, for causes that might have been intentional,<sup>2</sup> Abū Ishāq did not appear, and, in rather ambiguous circumstances, the rich patron and Ḥanbalī sympathizer Abū Maṇṣūr b. Yūsuf (d. 460/1067)<sup>3</sup> offered the job, without consultations from Niẓām al-Mulk (who was in Khurasān at the time), to the senior-most Shāfi‘ī juriconsort of the city, a certain Abū Naṣr b. al-Ṣabbāgh (d. 477/1084).<sup>4</sup> When Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh protested that he might not get approval, Abū Maṇṣūr assured him that he personally would do everything to secure the position for him. However, when news of this eventually reached Niẓām al-Mulk, he reacted with strong anger, and wrote a scathing letter to the caretaker of the *madrasa*, reprimanding him in extremely harsh words for allowing this to happen. He also penalized him monetarily.<sup>5</sup> Of extreme significance, he wrote in this letter, “*For whom did I found this College if not for Abū Ishāq?*”<sup>6</sup> Hence, after only twenty days of teaching, Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh was asked to leave and the professorship was handed back to Abū Ishāq, who kept it for sixteen years, until he died in 476/1083.

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<sup>1</sup> For his biography, see Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*, p. 277-9; *GAL*, I, 387-8. For an overview of his Ash‘arī writings, see: Eric Chaumont, “Encore au sujet de l’Ash‘arisme d’Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 74 (1991), pp. 167-77.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Shīrāzī was intercepted by a youth on the way, who told him that much of the material used for construction of the school was obtained via illegal methods. Hearing this, he returned and refused to teach in it. It is highly probable that al-Shīrāzī’s well-known asceticism was used against him by other factions. See: G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> He was one of the most philanthropic Ḥanbalī businessmen of the city, and a friend of the Caliph. See: G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> For his biography, see: al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya*, vol. 5, pp. 122-34; *GAL*, I, 388.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaṣam*, vol. 9, p. 469 (I believe ‘wa-aqām al-qīyāma ‘alā al-‘amīd’ should read ‘wa-aqām al-qīma ‘alā al-‘amīd’ as the latter makes more sense).

<sup>6</sup> G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 33. Italics mine.

This story requires some explanation. The question arises as to why a Ḥanbalī would seek to intervene in a Shāfi‘ī institution, and use his connections and finances to pick another candidate, reassuring him that he would do his best to secure his chair? And why would Niẓām al-Mulk, so far away from Baghdad, take such a passionate interest in choosing one of the candidates over the other? In fact, it appears that Niẓām al-Mulk had a specific *person* in mind before building the College. There seems to be no explicable reason to understand this chain of events unless one reads between the lines and compares Ibn Ṣabbāgh with Abū Iṣhāq.

Both Ibn Ṣabbāgh and Abū Iṣhāq were masters of Shāfi‘ī law. Both were of the senior-most juriconsults of the *madhhab*. Both were of a similar age and background. Both wrote works on Shāfi‘ī law. Neither seemed to have established any prior friendships with Niẓām al-Mulk. Reading through their respective biographies, there is little that seems to favor one over the other. In fact, both of them studied with some of the exact same teachers. But there is one marked difference.

Whereas Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh did not seem to have any major interest in theology,<sup>1</sup> Abū Iṣhāq was clearly an Ash‘arī theologian, and a vocal one at that. He wrote at least one work on Ash‘arī theology that is still extant, *al-Ishāra ilā madhhab ahl al-ḥaqq* ('The Allusion to the School of the People of Truth').<sup>2</sup> The work is a passionate defense of the Ash‘arī school. This, therefore, explains the Ḥanbalī attempts at blocking his

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<sup>1</sup> I say this since he might very well have been an Ash‘arī, but he was not a champion of its cause. In the list of his works, there is no work written on theology, and in going through the biographies available to me, no mention was made of any specific theological statement or controversy.

<sup>2</sup> The work, as far as I know, has only been printed once; it was edited by Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Julaynid (Cairo: Wizāra al-Awqāf, 1999)

acceptance and trying to set up a rival Shāfi‘ī, Ibn al-Šabbāgh, instead.<sup>1</sup> If one were to assume that Niẓām al-Mulk wanted to stress the theology of his chosen professor, it would also explain his insistence that Abū Ishāq be given the professorial chair. We shall return to this point later.<sup>2</sup>

Returning to our story, exactly one decade after the opening of the Niẓāmiyya, another significant incident occurred, which is mentioned in Ḥanbalī sources as the ‘Fitna of al-Qushayrī’.<sup>3</sup> While Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī was clearly an Ash‘arī, it appears that

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, in more than one place, refutes the basic outline of Goldziher’s premise (to be quoted below, and which I have followed), primarily on the basis of this al-Shīrāzī, claiming that he was not an Ash‘arī, hence the Niẓāmiyya College had little to do directly with Ash‘arism, and everything to do with the Shāfi‘ī legal school. However, this is simply incorrect. A cursory look at this theological work indicates that he was a through-and-through Ash‘arī (it should be noted that Makdisi did not have access to this work). For example, in his discussion of the Divine Attribute of *kalām* (*al-Ishāra*, pp. 130-8), he gives the distinctly Ash‘arī doctrine of the actual Speech being eternal, but without words or letters, devoid of language, and not heard by the creation; in describing the relationship of the Divine Attributes to God’s Essence (*idem.*, p. 149) he claims that the Attributes are neither God nor other than God. If any doubt remains regarding his theological inclinations, in more than one occasion he explicitly ascribes himself to the Ash‘arī creed and defends their doctrines by name, calling them ‘the people of the truth’ (as in *idem.*, p. 191, 195). In the conclusion of the work (*idem.*, pp. 193-5), he passionately calls on fellow Muslims not to believe gossip about this school but rather to seek informed knowledge directly from the sourcebooks.

As for Makdisi’s claim that al-Shīrāzī dissociates from Ash‘arī opinions in his work on *uṣūl al-fiqh*, this is a very interesting point that was used by al-Shīrāzī himself in front of his Ḥanbalī detractors, and persisted after his death as well. (This shall be discussed below; for now, it is interesting to note that even the Ḥanbalī theologian rebuffs this claim and accuses him of being double-faced; see: Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, v. 1, p. 41). However, even this claim of dissociating from Ash‘arī doctrine is not found explicitly in the printed work available to me (*al-Luma‘ fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, ed. Dr. Muṣṭafā Abū Sulaymān al-Nadwī). Additionally, Ibn ‘Asākir, in his *Tabyīn* (p. 277), lists him as an Ash‘arī, and claims that some people mistakenly assumed he was not an Ash‘arī because of an ambiguous phrase in his work on *uṣūl al-fiqh*; rather, as Ibn ‘Asākir points out, this was because he disagreed with the opinions of other members of his school on this one issue, and not in their basic doctrine.

Chaumont, in his article, reaches a similar conclusion: that al-Shīrāzī was an Ash‘arī overall but disagreed with the *madhab* in certain matters of *uṣūl al-fiqh*; see *idem.*, “Encore au sujet de l’Ash‘arisme d’Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī,” pp. 175-7.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to claim that only Ash‘arīs were allowed to teach at the Niẓāmiyya, but rather that the most prestigious posts were given to them. Ibn al-Jawzī specifically mentions an Arabic professor who was not an Ash‘arī (see: Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntażam*, vol. 10, p. 357).

<sup>3</sup> The primary sources for this event are: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, v. 3 p. 441-443; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntażam*, v. 9, p. 538-40; Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl ‘alā ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, v. 1, p. 39-44. Also see: A. Talas, *La Madrasa Nizamiyya et son histoire*, p. 66; R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 155.

The fact that the Shāfi‘ī sources gloss over this event, and seem hesitant to mention any significant level of detail leaves little doubt that in this case the Ḥanbalī’s sense of being unjustly handled seems to have some basis. For the Shāfi‘ī sources, brief as they are, see: Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya* v. 7, p. 162; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, v. 12 p. 584.

certain factors prevented him from preaching the doctrines of his school as publicly as Nizām al-Mulk would have wanted.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the decision was made to send a bolder theologian: one who would not shy away from the heat that would inevitably be generated by teaching anti-Ḥanbalī doctrines in a Ḥanbalī-dominated city. The person chosen for this endeavor was Abū Naṣr ‘Abd al-Rahīm b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 514/1120).<sup>2</sup> This was to be the first attempt to publicly and boldly advertise Ash‘arī doctrines in Baghdad,<sup>3</sup> and it proved to be a complete disaster.

Al-Qushayrī was sent from Nishapur to Baghdad sometime in 469/1077, whence he immediately began to preach Ash‘arī theology, publicly criticizing the Ḥanbalīs and labeling them *mujassima*, or ‘anthropomorphists’. Abū Ishaq al-Shirazi supported al-Qushayrī in this endeavor. This news spread quickly in the city, and raised the ire of the Ḥanbalīs. The leading Ḥanbalī cleric of the city, al-Sharīf Abū Ja‘far (d. 470/1078),<sup>4</sup> who had by this time retired to an outlying suburb, returned to the city in order to

<sup>1</sup> Sources seem to indicate that he did not possess a strong personality, and tried to appease all parties. Hence, both the Ash‘arī Nizām al-Mulk and Ḥanbalī al-Sharīf Abū Ja‘far could criticize al-Shirazi for his finicky character, the latter explicitly accusing him of being double-faced; see G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” p. 34, Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntażam*, vol. 9, p. 475; Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl tabaqat al-Hanābila*, v. 1, p. 36. In his theological work, *al-Ishāra*, (p. 195), al-Shirazi rebuffs the charge that keeping theological doctrines secret is a sign that they must be corrupt (which supports the thesis that he had been accused of not being as explicit as he should).

<sup>2</sup> This al-Qushayrī should not be confused with his father, Abd al-Karim b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, one of the luminaries of *taṣawwuf* and author of the famous *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, a classic manual of early Šūfi thought. mention of whom has been made in the previous section. The younger al-Qushayrī studied *kalām* with Ibn Furak, al-Juwainī, and Abu Ishaq al-Isfrā’īnī, and was more known for his adherence to Ash‘arī doctrines than for *taṣawwuf*. For his biography, see: al-Subkī, *Tabaqat al-Shāfi‘iyya*, v. 7 pp. 159–66; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn* pp. 308–17; *EI2*, s.v. ‘al-Qushayrī’ (H. Halm); A. Talas, *La Madrasa Nizamiyya et son histoire*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Abī Ya‘lā , in his *Tabaqat al-Hanābila* (v. 3, p. 442), writes that prior to the arrival of al-Qushayrī, Ash‘arī doctrine “...had never been publicly spread, due to the treatment they (i.e., Ash‘arīs) would receive from our Companions, and their (i.e., Ḥanbalī) suppression of them (i.e., Ash‘arīs).”

<sup>4</sup> He was a direct cousin of the Caliph as well. For his biography, see Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Tabaqat al-Hanābila*, v. 3 pp. 439–447; Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, v. 1, pp. 29–47; al-Dhababī, *Siyar*, v. 18, pp. 546–7; *GAL*, I, 687; G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” p. 5. An indication of his prominence and acceptance is the fact that he was the primary Ḥanbalī judge in front of whom Ibn ‘Aqīl had to recite his famous repentance and recantation; see G. Makdisi, *Ibn Aqīl*, p. 4. He was also the person whom the Caliph al-Qā’im instructed should wash and shroud him when he died (Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntażam*, v. 9, p. 549).

counteract the new movement, and began preaching Ḥanbalī theology in another mosque. Only a few years earlier, this same Abū Ja‘far had successfully quelled an attempt by the Mu‘tazilīs to publicly preach their doctrines.<sup>1</sup> Matters reached a climax in the month of Shawwāl 469 (June, 1074), and the two groups of students began to engage in more and more heated debate, but the two main theologians, al-Qushayrī on the one side and al-Sharīf Abū Ja‘far on the other, avoided each other.<sup>2</sup> Al-Shīrāzī, sensing the rising tide of Ḥanbalī anger, wrote to Niẓām al-Mulk, begging for help.<sup>3</sup> Realizing that a showdown was imminent, both sides prepared for some type of battle.<sup>4</sup>

All sources mention that al-Qushayrī’s students were the first to instigate the fight; they gathered together and made their way to the mosque in which al-Sharīf Abū Ja‘far was preaching. Abū Ja‘far’s students were prepared, and pelted the group with clay bricks (*qurr*). Fighting broke out between the two parties, in which an innocent bystander was killed, and many shops damaged. The students of al-Qushayrī retreated to the Niẓāmiyya and locked the doors, calling out loudly for help from the Fāṭimid Caliph al-Muqtadī (reg. 467-78/1074-84) would not help them because of his pro-Ḥanbalī tendencies.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, v. 1 p. 37. Of significance is that they marched to the Royal *Dīwān* and demanded that the official copy of the Qādari creed be handed to them, after which they proceeded to read it in the Grand Mosque, and agreed to curse all those who opposed it.

<sup>2</sup> When al-Sharīf Abū Ja‘far was finally called by the Caliph to quell the dispute, he did not even recognize al-Qushayrī, see: Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntażam*, v. 9, p. 539.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntażam*, v. 9, p. 538. The question arises as to what type of help he was asking: military or scholarly? The sources at our disposal do not provide an answer.

<sup>4</sup> The Ḥanbalī Ibn al-Jawzī even mentions that al-Qushayrī’s entourage had hired out some Jews to pretend to convert at his hand, in order to show his superiority; apparently the plan backfired (Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntażam*, v. 9, p. 538).

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, v. 1, p. 40.

students of Abū Ja‘far marched to the Niżāmiyya, but apparently no further fighting happened at this instance.

Abū Ishāq, who was the senior-most professor at the institution, became extremely angry at this turn of events, and announced his intention to return to Nishapur, presumably intending to resign. The Caliph prohibited him from leaving, so Abū Ishāq sent a messenger to Niżām al-Mulk apprising him of the situation. His reply came back, expressing his anger that the Ḥanbalīs had overpowered them.<sup>1</sup> The letter also stated, “...and I see that we should desist in speaking about this school that I have built.”<sup>2</sup>

The Caliph feared that the Shāfi‘īs would paint a negative picture of him in front of Niżām al-Mulk and the Seljuq Sultān,<sup>3</sup> so he ordered his vizier to call a meeting of all the senior theologians involved, in particular Abū Ja‘far, al-Shīrāzī, and al-Qushayrī, in an attempt to quell any further tensions. The vizier began by praising Abū Ja‘far and extolling his virtues, and then called the rest of those present to reconcile with Abū Ja‘far. Al-Shīrāzī stood up, kissed the head of the elderly Ḥanbalī theologian, and said, “I am the same one whom you know [so well] – and these are my works in *uṣūl al-fiqh* in which I say opinions contrary to the Ash‘arīs!” Abū Ja‘far immediately retorted, “All this is as you say, but when you were [alone] without help, your true intentions were not manifested. Now, however, when help has come to you, [in the form of] the Sultān

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<sup>1</sup> In the words of Ibn al-Jawzī: ‘wa-l-ghadabu li-tasalluṭ al-Ḥanābila ‘alā al-ṭā’ifa al-ukhrā’; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, v. 9, p. 539.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, v. 9, p. 539. The meaning appears to be that the Niżāmiyya should no longer be mentioned within the context of the friction between the two groups.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Rajab, in his *Dhayl* (v. 1, p. 40), writes, “And the Caliph was fearful of the Sultān and his vizier Niżām al-Mulk, and would try to appease the both of them.”

and Khwāja Buzurg [meaning Niẓām al-Mulk],<sup>1</sup> you have shown your true colors and manifested what you had hidden previously.”<sup>2</sup> Another leading Ṣūfī who was present attempted to kiss his hand, but he rebuffed him as well, stating that someone of his background, involved as he was with music and dancing,<sup>3</sup> had no business getting involved in theological and legal disputes. Then al-Qushayrī stood up, at which Abū Ja‘far asked, “And who is this?” When he was informed of the identity of this new appeaser, he said, “If anyone should be thanked for his heresy, it should be this young man, for he has expressed clearly to us what he believes (*lit.* ‘what is inside of him’), and did not show any hypocrisy, unlike these other two!” He then turned to the vizier, and said, “How can there be any reconciliation between us? Reconciliation can only happen when people are arguing over positions, or money, or inheritance, or arguing over control of the kingdom. As for these people, they presume us to be disbelievers, and we too consider those who oppose our beliefs to be disbelievers, so what type of reconciliation can be done between us? And here is the Imam [viz., Caliph], harassing the Muslims – but did not his own grandfathers<sup>4</sup> al-Qā’im and al-Qādir command that their beliefs be made public to the people, and this was then recited to them in their

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Khwaja Buzurg’ was one of the titles of Niẓām al-Mulk; see the editor’s footnote in Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, v. 1, p. 41, ft. 4.

<sup>2</sup> This clearly supports the claim above that al-Shirāzī was an Ash‘arī but differed with the school in some tertiary matters; Abū Ja‘far accuses him of having ‘hidden’ his theology when he was without help, and ‘revealing it’ when he was in a position of power.

<sup>3</sup> An obvious attempt to parody the Ṣūfic concepts of *raqṣ* and *samā‘*.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Muqtadī’s paternal grandfather was al-Qā’im, and al-Qā’im’s father was al-Qādir.

gatherings, and the people of Khurasān and all over<sup>1</sup> carried these to the farthest corners of Earth? So as for us, we still remain upon those beliefs.”<sup>2</sup>

The vizier, seeing that there was no hope, reported back to the Caliph in another part of the Palace, who then commanded that Abū Ja‘far should remain in a special section of the Palace, where visitors could come to see him, but he would not be allowed to leave, and his needs would be taken care of.<sup>3</sup> A letter was also sent to Niẓām al-Mulk, requesting that he recall al-Qushayrī back to Nishapur, and this too was eventually done, and al-Qushayrī was commanded to reside in Nishapur, where he remained until his death.<sup>4</sup>

With the leaders of both parties safely out of sight, it was felt that the *fitna* in Baghdad had come to an end. Unfortunately, the worst was still to come. It appears that the way the two leaders had been treated – the one under house arrest and the other expelled – continued to provoke students on both sides of this theological divide, and matters once again reached critical levels. In Ramaḍān of the following year, 470 AH (March, 1078), Abū Ishaq al-Shirāzī once again wrote to Niẓām al-Mulk, asking for

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<sup>1</sup> He specifies Khurasān presumably because he views Ash‘arī thought as having been imported from there, thus stressing that even Khurasān had been a bastion of Ḥanbalī thought once upon a time.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaṣam*, v. 9, p. 540; Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, v. 1, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> It is clear from the sources that it was the Caliph who ordered this ‘house arrest’, and not Niẓām al-Mulk. This is due to the fact that Niẓām would not wish to overstep bounds of authority within Baghdad, and al-Sharīf was also related to the Caliph by blood. Eventually, al-Sharīf was denied visitors as well, and he remained confined to the Palace until he fell severely ill. Rumors spread that the ‘students’ (this can only be a reference to the students of the Niẓāmiyya) had poisoned him. Fearing that his death was nigh, he asked and was granted permission to return to his family, where he died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Ṣafar, 470 (7<sup>th</sup> Sep, 1077). Even at his funeral, rumors of him having been poisoned by the Ash‘arīs persisted. See: Ibn Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābila*, v. 3 p. 443; Ibn Rajab, *Dhayl*, v. 1, pp. 42-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, v. 11 p. 681; *EI2*, s.v. ‘al-Ḳushayrī’ (H. Halm).

advice “...regarding the issue of the Ḥanbalīs.”<sup>1</sup> The response that came is quite intriguing, and clearly demonstrates the impatience and frustration Niẓām al-Mulk felt towards al-Shīrāzī. More importantly for us, it discusses the motivation for building the Niẓāmiyya. Due to its significance, the letter is translated in its entirety as found in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *al-Muntaẓam*:<sup>2</sup>

Your letter came to us, in a manner that clearly was more verbose than necessary. It is not in the best interest of the Sultān that he adopt a policy which favors one *madhab* over another, and it is more befitting that we support the *Sunna* rather than exacerbate *fitna*. And we did not intend anything through the building of this *madrasa* except to protect the people of knowledge and [to] benefit [the people]. [We did not build it] to cause disunity, or to split ranks. And whenever matters go contrary to what we had intended from these means, there is no choice left except to shut this door. *And it is not in our power to tackle Baghdad and its surroundings, or to convert them (naqlīhim) from what they have been accustomed to from before.* For what is predominate in that region is the *madhab* of Imām Abū Abdallāh Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal –may God have mercy on his soul – and his status is well-known amongst the scholars, and his rank is famous in [defending] the *Sunna*. What has reached us is that this matter once again resurfaced [viz., the dispute between the Ḥanbalīs and Ash‘arīs] because of a question that had been posed to Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī<sup>3</sup> in the fundamentals [of the religion], and the response he gave them was something different from what they believed in their theology. The Shaykh, the Imām, Abū Ishāq [al-Shīrāzī] – may God strengthen him – is a man who has a clean heart, *but is easy to lead, and*

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, v. 9, p. 545. This is the primary source for the details of the letter, although the incident itself is referenced in other sources as well.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, v. 9, pp. 545-6. Emphasis mine. For a slightly different, but not incompatible, interpretation, see: R. Bulliet, “Local Politics in Easter Iran Under the Ghaznavids and Seljuks,” p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear in the sources when exactly al-Qushayrī was exiled; was it immediately after the first incident in 470, or a few months later. This letter seems to suggest that al-Qushayrī was still present in Baghdad. Alternately, it could be understood that a previous response of al-Qushayrī continued to prove troublesome even after he left.

*he follows any who tries to pull him.* And we have, in our [received] correspondence from him, that which clearly shows this ease by which he is pulled.

The significance of this letter cannot be overstressed. Niẓām al-Mulk explicitly states that the attempt to change the theology of the people of Baghdad from Ḥanbalism to Ash‘arism is impossible, and because it is causing so much chaos, this needs to be abandoned and the people left alone. In the eyes of Niẓām al-Mulk, it is primarily the weak character of al-Shīrāzī that is to blame for this; presumably, Niẓām believes, if al-Shīrāzī had taken a more definitive stance instead of cowering under pressure, more ground would have been gained for the Ash‘arīs. The letter also clearly demonstrates that the spread of Ash‘arism was one of the primary intentions of Niẓām al-Mulk in building his Niẓāmiyyas.<sup>1</sup>

The news of this letter quickly spilled out onto the streets, and the Ḥanbalīs saw it as a clear victory for their party. Presumably, they would have relished and bragged about this, which, of course, led to a reaction from the Ash‘arīs. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Shawwāl, 470 (18<sup>th</sup> April, 1078), a student of the Niẓāmiyya by the name of al-Iskandarānī, accompanied by some of his friends, began speaking loudly in the market-place, and eventually claimed that the Ḥanbalīs were disbelievers. Immediately, he was hit with a brick from an unknown assailant. He returned to the Niẓāmiyya, and beseeched its inhabitants for help. After all that had occurred in the last ten months, the students had had enough, as had the Ḥanbalīs of Baghdad. A riot broke out in the market-place, and chaos ensued. In the melee, weapons were brought out, and over a dozen people

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<sup>1</sup> This, of course, is completely contrary to G. Makdisi’s premise that the *madrasas* in general, and the Niẓāmiyya in particular, were specifically legal schools without any theological underpinnings. Clearly, in light of this letter and the entire circumstances of the incident of al-Qushayrī, this position is untenable.

were killed, including a sick person who was recovering in a room in the Niżāmiyya. The people had to rush to the *Dīwān* of the Caliph for help, and the army was called on the streets to quell the mob.

Thus ended the *fitna* between the Ḥanbalīs and Ash‘arīs; the senseless loss of life and the foolish chaos in public appears to have brought both groups to their senses.

One last minor skirmish occurred in 538/1143. Ibn al-Jawzī gives us details of this incident, in which a Ḥanafī jurist sympathetic to Ḥanbalī theology<sup>1</sup> won favor with the Caliph, and publicly criticized Ash‘arīs and Mu‘tazilīs. Eventually, he petitioned the Caliph to “...erase the term ‘Ash‘arī’ that had been attached outside the Niżāmiyya College,”<sup>2</sup> which he agreed to do. There does not appear to have been any physical violence because of this removal.

This minor incident of the sign-post is extremely telling, and fits perfectly with the thesis outlined above. The very fact that the Niżāmiyya College could be called, “The Ash‘arī Niżāmiyya College,” and have a large plaque outside its main entrance advertising it as such, leaves little doubt as to one of the primary characteristics that the College wished to instill on its students. If this description were to have existed from the inception of the Niżāmiyya (as appears to be the case), there would be little doubt left that Niżām al-Mulk explicitly intended the institution to be Ash‘arī. However, even if one were to assume that the plaque came a few decades later, the very fact that

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<sup>1</sup> It is rare, although not unheard of, to find a Ḥanafī jurist who adopted Orthodox Sunnism. Another example is the famous, ‘Alī b. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, commonly known as Ibn Abī al-‘Izz al-Ḥanafī (d. 792/1390), whose commentary (*sharḥ*) of the *Creed* of al-Tahāwī consists of lengthy, verbatim quotes from Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, and hence has been adopted as the standard textbook for theology in most undergraduate curriculums sympathetic to Ḥanbalī theology in the world, including the Islamic University of Medina and Imām Muḥammad b. Sa‘ūd University in Riyad.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaṣam*, vol. 10, p. 538.

the entire Institution could be ascribed to the theological school leaves little doubt that its function had become one of producing Ash‘arī-Shāfi‘ī scholars.

Returning to the *fitna* of al-Qushayrī, while the door of physical violence was closed between the Ash‘arīs and Ḥanbalīs, it actually marked the beginning of a long and fierce intellectual battle between them – a battle that resurfaced time and again, and in fact continues to the present day.<sup>1</sup>

After the death of Abū Ishāq in 476/1083, a number of professors, all Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī, occupied the chair of the Niẓāmiyya in quick succession,<sup>2</sup> until finally Niẓām al-Mulk personally selected the brightest of all upcoming stars in Nishapur, and bestowed upon him the professorship of the Niẓāmiyya in the capital of Baghdad. That person was none other than Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). And with al-Ghazālī, a new chapter begins in the spread of Ash‘arī thought, one that has been narrated and analyzed numerous times, hence can be left off here.<sup>3</sup>

Let us now recap the primary thesis of the last two sections by quoting Goldziher, who continues to be an ever-quoted authority on all matters Islamic. Goldziher wrote, regarding the rise of Ash‘arī thought:<sup>4</sup>

...for a long time it was not possible for them [viz., Ash‘arīs] to teach theology in public. It was not until the middle of the eleventh century, when the Wazīr (sic.)

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, on more than one occasion, points out that the Ḥanbalīs and Ash‘arīs were considered one group and co-operated with one another until the *fitna* of al-Qushayrī. See: *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 3, p. 229; vol. 4, p. 17; and vol. 6, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> For a more complete list of professors, see: A. Talas, *La Madrasa Nizamiyya et son histoire*, pp. 56–100; G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” pp. 38–44; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 18, pp. 466–8. Note that not *all* teachers were Ash‘arī; however the position of the ‘chair’ (perhaps in our times the equivalent of the director and dean) were all given to Ash‘arīs.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Encyclopédie Iranica*, s.v., ‘Ghazālī’ (G. Bowering), for an overview of the life of al-Ghazālī and a summary of the primary studies on him.

<sup>4</sup> I. Goldziher, *Le dogme et la loi de l’Islam* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1920); translation from G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” p. 3. Emphasis mine.

of the Saljūqids, Niẓām al-Mulk, created public chairs in the great schools founded by him in Nishapur and Baghdad for the new theological doctrine that Ash‘arī dogmatic theology could be taught officially, and was admitted into the system of orthodox theology; its most illustrious representatives could have chairs in the Niẓāmiyya institutions. *It is, then, here that the victory of the Ash‘arī school was decided in its struggle against Mu‘tazilism on the one hand, and intransigent orthodoxy [viz., Ḥanbalī traditionalism] on the other.* The era in which these institutions flourishes is therefore important, not only in the history of education, but also in that of Muslim dogmatic theology.

The last pages have shown the validity of Goldziher’s thesis. Throughout his life, it is clear that Niẓām al-Mulk made a pointed effort of ensuring that the brightest Ash‘arī minds occupied professorial chairs at his institutions. The deciding factor was not mastery of Shāfi‘ī *fiqh*, but rather mastery of and public adherance to Ash‘arī doctrine. The adamancy of specifying Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī over Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh for the chair of Baghdad is perhaps the first clear evidence that Niẓām al-Mulk’s primary intention through the Niẓāmiyya was not solely the spread of the Shāfi‘ī school of law, but rather the spread of Ash‘arī doctrines along with the Shāfi‘ī school.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent sending of al-Qushayrī clearly buttresses this thesis. The introduction of al-Qushayrī to Baghdad cannot be interpreted *except* as a direct attempt by Niẓām al-Mulk to preach Ash‘arī doctrine. The vizier was in full control of the school, and no one could teach without his permission. For him to send a young fiery al-Qushayrī, whose family was personally persecuted by the anti-Ash‘arī polemics in Khurasān, could have no other purpose except this. Niẓām al-Mulk could not have predicted the riots that occurred;

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, of course, disagrees. His attempts to explain this rather odd sequence of events, in “Muslim Institutions,” pp. 36-7, seem, to me at least, rather tenuous.

once the *fitna* broke out, Niẓām al-Mulk repudiates, *not* al-Qushayrī for instigating and provoking the Ḥanbalīs, *but rather* al-Shīrāzī for not defending al-Qushayrī properly, and for wavering in the face of Ḥanbalī opposition. The leading Ḥanbalī theologian of Baghdad, al-Sharīf Abū Ja‘far, is able to explicitly link the audacity of the Ash‘arīs to the presence of Niẓām al-Mulk and his *madrasa*. In his second letter, Niẓām al-Mulk practically admits defeat and states as explicitly as possible that it is simply not possible to convert the people of Baghdad away from Ḥanbalī theology, since this is what they were accustomed to. This letter, therefore, very strongly suggests that the initial goal of Niẓām al-Mulk was to try to convert the people of Baghdad from Ḥanbalī theology to Ash‘arism, but since this was causing so much *fitna*, the policy had to be abandoned. The reaction to this letter (the ‘victory’ that the Ḥanbalīs felt) supports this interpretation.

Back in Nishapur, Niẓām al-Mulk chooses al-Juwainī to occupy the professorial chair of its Niẓāmiyya – someone who was so well known for his Ash‘arī tendencies that he was publicly expelled for them a decade ago. There were other Shāfi‘ī scholars in Nishapur who were senior to al-Juwainī in the legal *madhab*, but were not as senior in Ash‘arī thought. And when al-Juwainī wished to gift the generous Niẓām al-Mulk with a work, he did not write a legal manual of *fiqh*, but rather a theological one of Ash‘arī doctrine, which he named after the prime minister himself, the *al-‘Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*. Al-Juwainī, being from the same town as the vizier and knowing him personally for many decades, understood him better than any other scholar, and knew what would please him.

The first seven professors of theology in the Niżāmiyya of Baghdad were all trained in Persian Ash‘arī schools, even though, of course, the majority of students in Baghdad were Arabs and had not been previously exposed to Ash‘arī thought.<sup>1</sup> More than one of these professors made a public appeal to Ash‘arism, so much so that a few had to be told to desist in order to quell public unease.<sup>2</sup> The plaque outside the College’s main entrance advertised it as the ‘Ash‘arī Niżāmiyya College.’ The final supporting evidence for this thesis is the appointment of none other than al-Ghazālī to the most prestigious teaching position in the entire Caliphate: the chair of the Niżāmiyya of Baghdad.

The evidence is clear, and each and every fact mentioned above supports it: Niżām al-Mulk’s primary goal in building the Niżāmiyya was the spread of Ash‘arī doctrine (along with Shāfi‘ī *fiqh*). He genuinely and passionately believed in the Ash‘arī cause, and did everything in his power to see it spread.<sup>3</sup>

Bulliet writes:<sup>4</sup>

Ash‘arī theology, therefore, was an Iranian export to the Arab world in the late eleventh century. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī looms historically as the definitive codifier and paramount disseminator of Ash‘arī thought; but scores of lesser Iranian scholars carried the message abroad, not just to Iraq and Syria, but to

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<sup>1</sup> Bulliet, *Islam: A View from the Edge*, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī lists quite a few of these early professors, and claims that they were all ardent Ash‘arīs. The ones that I could find are: Abū ‘Alī al-Faqīh (d. 525/1131), who would use his Niżāmiyya post to write poetry in praise of Ash‘arism (*idem.*, *al-Muntaṣam*, vol. 9, p. 245), Abū al-Faḍā’il ibn Shaqrān (d. 561/1165), who was so forceful in his defence of Ash‘arism that the vizier had to request him to leave his position (*ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 487); and Yūsuf b. Abdillāh al-Bundār (d. 563/1167), who was, according to our Ḥanbālī biographer, a ‘fanatic Ash‘arī’ (*ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 181). These, of course, are in addition to the ones already mentioned, and the *fitna* of al-Qushayrī.

<sup>3</sup> T. Nagel also ascribes the dominance of this brand of Sunnism to Niżām al-Mulk and his policies; see: *idem.*, *A History of Islamic Theology*, pp. 178, 181.

<sup>4</sup> Bulliet, *Islam from the Edge*, p. 156.

Anatolia and India as well. And the new *madrasa*, supervised by expatriate Iranians or their students, provided the institutional environment for exposing people to the new theology.

Later on, he continues,<sup>1</sup>

For the first time, Islam developed a non-governmental center in the form of a near-consensus on the basic beliefs and forms of Sunnī Islam. The history of this center was then, understandably, retrojected to the earliest period in Islamic history. But, to a large extent, it was a center created by social currents that had originated on the edges of Islamic society in Iran.

#### 2.2.5 Later Developments

By any standards, the educational revolution initiated by Niẓām al-Mulk was a resounding success. Even the Ḥanbalī Ibn ‘Aqīl (d. 513/1119), who was a young man when Niẓām al-Mulk was in power, could not fail to be impressed, for he wrote:

We have seen, in our youth, religious intellectuals, ascetics, and great personages, with whom it was agreeable to associate. As for Niẓām al-Mulk, his conduct dazzled the mind by his liberality, nobility, and decorum, and by his revitalization of the landmarks of religion. *He founded colleges of law and instituted charitable trusts for them. He gave new life to learning, lifted the spirits of its people, reconstructed the two Holy Cities, built libraries and brought books for them. Thus, knowledge flourished in his day...*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168. Emphasis mine. Also note that Bulliet claims there to be a near-consensus, but there was always a significantly vocal, albeit at certain times minority, of *Ahl al-Hadīth* even in the cities that were dominated by the Niẓāmiyyas.

<sup>2</sup> G. Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqil*, p. 188. Emphasis mine.

The concept of a systemized *madrasa*, as embodied in the Niżāmiyya, spread like wildfire in Muslim lands.<sup>1</sup> Within a century and a half after the founding of the first Niżāmiyya, there were over thirty *madrasas* in Baghdad alone, and over fifty in Damascus. In Mecca, the first *madrasa* was founded in 571/1175, in Tunis, 650/1252, and in Andalus, in 651/1253. A decade or so later, the concept reached Delhi and the first Indian *madrasas* were formed.<sup>2</sup> There is much evidence to suggest that Western universities acquired, not just the idea of a higher center of learning, but also many other aspects of modern University protocol, from their eastern neighbors.<sup>3</sup>

As *madrasas* were formed, they desperately needed teachers, and the graduates of the Niżāmiyya just as desperately needed jobs. In effect, by teaching the teachers in the state-financed Niżāmiyyas and graduating batches after batches of ‘ulama from them, Ash‘arism secured for itself an unprecedented place in the masjids, *madrasas*, towns and villages across the Islamic world. It was a perfect match, and one that helped to standardize much of what was to become an Ash‘arī ‘orthodoxy’. Even if these other *madrasas* were not controlled by the State, or did not follow the exact curriculum of the Niżāmiyya, by virtue of the fact that the Niżāmiyya was the first such large-scaled effort to standardize the system of learning, it caused a domino effect of spreading Ash‘arism (and other specific interpretations of Islamic sciences) to all parts of the Muslim world.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Bulliet, *Islam: A View from the Edge*, pp. 148-149.

<sup>3</sup> These include: the division of students into undergraduates and graduates; the concept of an endowment; the final degree of *licentia docendi*, from the Islamic equivalent *ijāza al-tadrīs* (which later became a Ph.D.), and other aspects. See: G. Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions of Learning,” pp. 2-3.

Niżām al-Mulk's success in Baghdad was emulated elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Nūr al-Dīn al-Zangī (d. 569/1174) was the first to build *madrasas* in Syria, and, following the cue of Niżām al-Mulk, he had them named after himself: the Nūriyya. The famous traveler Ibn Jubayr (d. 613/1217) said of one of them "...it is one of the most beautiful *madrasas* in the world – it is like a magnificent palace."<sup>2</sup> Nūr al-Dīn had at least five such schools built, in Homs, Hama, Aleppo, and Ba'labak.<sup>3</sup> The Ash'arī influence, while not as pronounced as will be seen in his protégé Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, was still clearly visible. In Mosul, he placed the Ash'arī Abū Bakr al-Burqānī in charge of teaching in its main mosque; al- Burqānī was a student of Muḥammad b. Yaḥya (d. 549/1154), one of the most loyal students of al-Ghazālī.<sup>4</sup> Nūr al-Dīn also built the largest ever *Dār al-Hadīth* in Damascus, and handed it over to the famous Ash'arī theologian and historian Ibn 'Asākir.<sup>5</sup> In the city of Aleppo (Halab), he built another school and handed it over to Abū al-Ma'ālī Maṣ'ud b. Muḥammad al-Naysabūrī (d. 578/1182), a professor who had previously taught at the Niżāmiyya in Nishapur.<sup>6</sup> It was here that Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (d. 589/1193) himself studied an Ash'arī text written by Abū al-Ma'ālī and memorized it.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> al-Maqrīzī, in his *Khiṭāṭ*, specifically points out that the Niżāmiyya served as a model for other schools: ‘...fa-qtadā al-nās bihī fī al-Irāq wa Khurasān wa ma warā al-nahr...’; al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭāṭ*, vol. 2, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Jubayr, *al-Rīḥla*, ed. Huṣayn Naṣṣār (Cairo: Maktaba al-Tijāriyya, 1955), p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> Ibrāhīm Yasīn al-Khaṭīb, *Dawr al-ta'līm fī tahrīr bayt al-maqdis* (Amman: Dār Ḥunayn, 1993), p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, vol. 12, p. 781. Two other students of Muḥammad b. Yaḥya also played a vital role in the spread of Ash'arism in Ayyūbid lands; see: Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya*, vol. 7, p. 223. Ibn 'Asākir himself was also a product of the Niżāmiyya of Baghdad.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 297. These last three accounts support the thesis above that the Niżāmiyya had a direct role in affecting the teachers of other *madrasas* around the Muslim world.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭāṭ*, vol. 2, p. 358.

When Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn came to power, he followed in the footsteps of Nūr al-Dīn and Niẓām al-Mulk in utilizing educational institutions as a means of political support. In 566/1172, as a minister under the Fāṭimids, he replaced the Fāṭimid Isma’īlī judge of Egypt with the famous Ash‘arī, ‘Abd al-Mālik b. Darbās al-Maradānī al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 605/1209),<sup>1</sup> and converted the Shī‘ī *madrasas* to Sunnī Ash‘arī ones, the most recognized, of course, being the famous al-Azhar. Additionally, he built a series of new *madrasas*, the first of which was the Nāṣiriyya, which was built in the year 566/1172, next to the grave of al-Shāfi‘ī himself. This, not surprisingly, he gifted to the Shāfi‘īs. Immediately afterwards, he opened up the Qumhiyya for the Mālikīs.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, he built a number of *madrasas* in his name, the Ṣalāḥiyyas.<sup>3</sup> He is reported to have said, “We have only built these schools in order to spread knowledge, and overcome innovation, and strengthen the religion.”<sup>4</sup>

By doing so, he became the first to build Sunnī schools in Egypt – previously, the Fāṭimids had build a number of Shī‘ī schools to spread their doctrines, but there had been no school of Sunnī law or theology in the entire region.<sup>5</sup>

The Ash‘arī tendencies of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn appear to be more pronounced than those of Nūr al-Dīn; he himself had been trained at an Ash‘arī institution,<sup>1</sup> and his actions

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, v. 12, p. 782. ‘Abd al-Malik wrote a treatise entitled *Risāla fī al-dhabb ‘an Abī-l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī* (*In Defence of Abī-l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*). It was edited and printed by Dr. ‘Alī Nāṣir al-Faqīhī (Medina: n.p., 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭāṭ*, vol. 2, pp. 36-6.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Khaṭīb, *Dawr al-ta‘līm fī tahrīt bayt al-maqdis*, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Khaṭīb, *Dawr al-ta‘līm fī tahrīt bayt al-maqdis*, p. 55, from al-Na‘īmī’s (d. 927/1521) work *al-Dāris fī ta‘rīkh al-madāris*.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭāṭ*, vol. 2, p. 363.

indicate that he too, like Niżām al-Mulk, was extremely supportive of the school. Ṣalāh al-Dīn handed over the Nāṣiriyya to Najm al-Dīn al-Khubushānī (d. 587/1191).<sup>2</sup> Ṣalāh al-Dīn admired him greatly, utilized his services frequently, and believed him to be a saintly man ('wa kān ya'taqidu fī-hī').<sup>3</sup> Najm al-Dīn was by all accounts an ardent, over-zealous Ash'arī,<sup>4</sup> so much so that when the *madrasa* was being built next to the grave of al-Shāfi'i, a grave of a Ḥanbalī who had been buried close-by was dug up al-Khubushānī, who began to throw the bones of the dead man outside, claiming, "This was a *hashawī*, and he should not be next to the Imam; the grave of a saint and a heretic (*zindiq*) cannot be in the same place."<sup>5</sup> Obviously, this caused great distress to the Ḥanbalīs, but they were simply not in any position to do anything, and he won over them.<sup>6</sup>

This occurrence appears to be the *only* tension that occurred between the Ash'arīs and the traditionalist Ḥanbalīs in Egypt; symbolically, it involved the grave of a dead Ḥanbalī. If the Ḥanbalīs were so powerless that they could not even protect the dead, how could they possibly ensure the flourishing of their ideas amongst the living? Therefore, the introduction of Ash'arī thought in Egypt, unlike its introduction in Baghdad, caused no public outcry, nor did it result in any clashes.

<sup>1</sup> Another incident which shows his attachment to the school is that when the most famous Ash'arī of the era, Ibn 'Asākir, died, Ṣalāh al-Dīn was present at his funeral and prayed for him. See: Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-udabā'*, (Cairo: 'Isā Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.) vol. 6, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> See: al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya*, vol. 7, p. 14-21; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 21, p. 204-7.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 21, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, he appears to be over-zealous against all other groups. His biographers all mention various incidents that show his harsh nature – he would also make it a point to target *dhimmīs*.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 20, p. 454; al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya*, vol. 7 p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 21, p. 205.

Şalāḥ al-Dīn also commissioned the Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī scholar Muḥammad b. Hibatullāh al-Makkī to write a creed, which he entitled *Hadā’iq al-fuṣūl wa-jawāhir al-‘uqūl* ('The Garden of the Seasons and the Jewels of the Intellect').<sup>1</sup> This work was used as a standard textbook in all of the *madrasa* and *kuttābs* (i.e., children's schools) of the region.<sup>2</sup> He decreed that all theology that was to be taught must conform to Sunnī (viz., Ash‘arī) theology; as a later chronicler writes, he "...required all of the people, during his era, to follow it. And this remained the case during the reign of all the Kings of the Banū Ayyūb (i.e., the Ayyūbids), and then during the reign of their followers, the *Mulūk al-Attrāk* (i.e., the Mamlūks)."<sup>3</sup>

Under the Ayyūbids alone, over a hundred and thirty *madrasas* are reported to have been built in Egypt and Syria.<sup>4</sup> Significantly, not a single one of them was for the Ḥanbalīs – the only Ḥanbalī schools in Ayyūbid lands were those that had been built before the coming of that dynasty to power.<sup>5</sup> The school was also sidelined in the Mamlūk era as well (probably as a direct effect of its marginalization in Ayyūbid times), and no new Ḥanbalī schools were built in the region for over three centuries. With the odds stacked so greatly against them, it comes as no great surprise that

<sup>1</sup> The printing of this text that is available to me is a compilation of miscellaneous texts, this being one of them, under the titled *al-Naqā’is*, compiled by Kamāl Yūsuf Ḥūt (Cairo: Markaz al-Khadamāt wa al-Abḥāth al-Thaqāfiyya, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> See: al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyā*, vol. 7, p.23-25; al-Khaṭīb, *Dawr al-ta’līm fī tahrīr bayt al-maqdis*, p. 162. I could not find a death date for this author in the sources that I looked up.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭāṭ*, vol. 2, p. 358.

<sup>4</sup> For a complete list, see: al-Khaṭīb, *Dawr al-ta’līm fī tahrīr bayt al-maqdis*, pp. 92-7. The Ayyūbids as a whole patronized many Ash‘arī scholars. Of particular importance were: Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 654/1256), who is probably the most authoritative Ash‘arī theologian of his era; al-‘Izz ibn ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262), who wrote a book of Ash‘arī doctrine; and Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī (d. 665/1267), who wrote a work critiquing the doctrines of the Ḥanbalīs. See: al-Khaṭīb, *Dawr al-ta’līm fī tahrīr bayt al-maqdis*, pp. 161-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Ḩanbalī/traditionalist theology gradually weaned, while Ash‘arī teachings became more and more dominant.

The most famous historian of medieval Egypt, al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1441), writes,

Regarding theology, the Sultān Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn carried the people upon the beliefs of Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī b. Ismā‘il al-Ash‘arī, the student of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī. He made [this creed] a necessary requirement [to be taught] in all of his endowments in Egypt, such as the *al-Madrasa al-Nāṣiryya* located next to the grave of Imam al-Shāfi‘ī, and other one, which is known as *al-Sharīfa*.... Thus [from that time onwards], the theology of al-Ash‘arī remained *status quo* in Egypt, Syria, the Hijaz, Yemen; in fact, even the Maghreb, as Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130) had introduced Ash‘arī doctrines there. Thus, what occurred was that this theology became so predominant in these lands that whoever opposed it would have had his neck cut off – and this remains the case until our times. There were not, in the Ayyūbid lands of Egypt, many [followers] of Abū Ḥanīfa, nor of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, but these two *madhhabs* did become popular later.<sup>1</sup>

This observation from al-Maqrīzī explicitly indicates the ‘Ash‘aratization’ that occurred due to these efforts. In fact, the Egyptian experience was even more advantageous to the Ash‘arī movement than the Iraq one; there were no strong footholds of traditionalist thought in Egypt that would oppose the *kalām*-based theology of the Ash‘arīs, in contrast to Baghdad. Additionally, the Sunnī population would have been elated to see the success of these various *madrasas* in combating the influences of Fāṭimid Shī‘ī thought (which, of course, was the primary function of the *madrasas* in the first place).

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭāṭ*, vol. 2, p. 343. The reference to the two scholars is, of course, a reference to the two theological schools of Māturīdism and Ḥanbalism.

It is, therefore, no surprise that Egypt became a primary center for Shāfi‘ī-Ash‘arī thought, especially in late Mamlūk times, and in fact remains so to this day.

To wrap up this section, the primary thesis has been to prove that the dominance of Ash‘arī theology was due almost exclusively to the function and role of the government-sponsored *madrasas*, first introduced by Nizām al-Mulk and then emulated elsewhere. The Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1223), writing at the turn of the seventh century from Damascus, alludes to the spread of Ash‘arism in his time, and considers it to be an apocalyptic sign of the end of the world.<sup>1</sup> He also describes the Ash‘arīs as “...people [who lust after] prestige and high positions, and own *madrasas* and *ribāṭs* and *waqfs* ... and God has indeed given them this world, but deprived them of religion, for they are always at the doors of rulers, and their emissaries ever drowning in their desire for material gain.”<sup>2</sup> In another work of his, he notes that they are the ones “...in charge of the political realm, and are in full control of the state.”<sup>3</sup> Harsh religious polemics aside, it is clear that Ibn Qudāma is painfully aware of the advantages the Ash‘arī scholars have in procuring positions and grants that the Ḥanbalīs had been deprived of.

The relatively minor role that Ash‘arism had prior to this stage is demonstrated by the dearth of its adherents. Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, writing in Nishapur before his arrival in Baghdad, laments the fact that Ash‘arī teachings cannot be taught in public, and that their number is so few. Ibn ‘Asākir, in his *Tabyīn kadhib al-muftarī* (‘A

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Qudāma, *Hikāya al-munāẓara*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Qudāma, *al-Burhān fī bayān al-Qur’ān*, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Qudāma, *Hikāya almunāẓara*, p. 35

Clarification Regarding the Lie of the Fabricator') can barely list eighty Ash‘arī scholars in the span of two and a half centuries, of whom only a dozen or so were highly-respected in their fields of specialization.<sup>1</sup> The very *raison d'être* of the work is an attempt to legitimize the school. Ibn ‘Asākir went to great lengths in order to reconcile the well-known traditionalist dislike for *kalām* with the Ash‘arī use of the science.<sup>2</sup> Even as late as 537/1142, once again the Ash‘arīs were persecuted (this time in Rayy), and their doctrines publicly repudiated; any person who claimed allegiance to the school was forced to recant.<sup>3</sup> Yet, by the time of Ibn Taymiyya, around two centuries after the first Niẓāmiyya opened, Ash‘arism had achieved such political dominance that they were now the strongest of all theological schools in almost all Muslim lands.

Through the Niẓāmiyya, the teachings of a hitherto small and relatively obscure group spread throughout Muslim lands, and Ash‘arism established itself in cities which previously had been closed to it, in particular, the Islamic capital of Baghdad. Coupled with the intellectual vacuum that had been created by the displacement of the Shī‘ī Buwayhid dynasty in the Arab heartlands, and the Ismā‘īlī Fātimid dynasty in Egypt, along with a complete lack of any alternative network of *madrasas*, the various Niẓāmiyyas and the *madrasas* that they spawned were the single most effective and powerful cause for the spread and eventual dominance of Ash‘arī thought in Seljuqic,

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arīs in Islamic Religious History I,” p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> The attempt was not very successful, and the later al-Subkī, one of Ibn Taymiyya’s most vocal critics, learnt these failures well and attempted to overcome them in his own *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*. See: G. Makdisi, “Ash‘arī and the Ash‘arīs in Islamic Religious History I,” pp. 57-60.

<sup>3</sup> G. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, p. 34.

Ayyūbid, and Mamlūk lands.<sup>1</sup> The innovative idea introduced by Niẓām al-Mulk – controlling the religious class by making it, even if indirectly, dependant on the state – was so successful that it continued to be adopted and implemented throughout the Muslim world. Perhaps it finally reached its apogee under the Ottomans, where the religious establishment was completely absorbed into the state bureaucracy.<sup>2</sup>

After the death of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, the Ayyūbid kingdom was divided amongst his relatives and descendants, and one outlying area in modern Iraq fell in the hands of Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb, Sultān al-Malik al-Ādil, the brother of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, who ruled 596/1200 to 615/1218. And when the most famous Ash’arī of his time, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), wished to write a work in dedication of this Sultān, he knew exactly what type of work would earn him the most respect and the greatest financial reward: a work on Ash’arī theology. That work was none other than the *Ta’sīs al-Taqdīs* (‘Establishing the Foundations of Sacredness’).

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<sup>1</sup> G. Makdisi, “Ash’arī and the Ash’arīs in Islamic Religious History I,” p. 38.

Makdisi’s final thesis, that the Ash’arī school suffered an eventual decline during al-Subkī’s era (*idem.*, p. 78), seems rather tenuous given the power that the school wielded during Ibn Taymiyya’s time. Also note that a detailed discussion of the Mamlūk patronage of madrasas and Ash’arī theologians is beyond the scope of this work (for that, the reader is referred to: ‘Abd al-Ghanī Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Āṭī, *al-Ta’līm fi Misr zaman al-Ayyūbiyyīn wa-l-Mamālik* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, n.d.), pp. 149–206, for an initial introduction). The main purpose of these last sections was to show the foundations for Ash’arī intellectual dominance, first in Seljuqic, and then in Ayyūbid lands. The Mamlūks were, in almost all affairs of the state, offshoots of the Ayyūbids.

There was yet another consequence, albeit obviously completely unintended and perhaps unbeknownst to Niẓām al-Mulk, and that was the standardization of a particular strand of Ash’arī thought. Like the Mu’tazilīs before them, Ash’arī theologians were not all in agreement regarding the finer details of their theology. The Ash’arism of al-Bāqillānī was different than that of Ibn Fūrak, and both had different beliefs than that of al-Bayhaqī, who perhaps was the closest of all Ash’arīs to *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* theology. Al-Juwainī was the first Ash’arī to introduce Avicennian concepts into Ash’arī theology, and from him Ash’arī theology underwent a revolutionary development, which eventually led to the likes of al-Rāzī, al-Āmidī, and al-Ījī. Had Niẓām al-Mulk chosen a more ‘traditional’ Ash’arī to take charge of the first Niẓāmiyya College, that too would have changed the course of Ash’arī intellectual history. Instead, other strands of Ash’arism practically died out after the establishment of the Niẓāmiyya, and the ‘Juwainī’ strand was allowed to develop and flourish. This is surely a topic worthy of a separate study.

<sup>2</sup> R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur*, p. 73.

### 3. *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the Ta'sīs al-taqdīs*

#### 3.1 *The Life of al-Rāzī*

Al-Rāzī's full name was Abū 'Abdillāh Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Taymī.<sup>1</sup> In his life-time he was known as Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy, and after his death his title of Fakhr al-Dīn became more popular. He was born in the city of Rayy, in the province of Jibāl, in what is modern Iran, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Ramadān 543 or 544 A.H. (1149 or 1150). His father, Ḏiyā' al-Dīn 'Umar, was the *khaṭīb* of the town, hence al-Rāzī's *laqab* of Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy. He studied Shāfi'i fiqh, Ash'arī theology<sup>2</sup> (having memorized al-Juwainī's *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*), and other basic sciences with his father, until the

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<sup>1</sup> The original sources of his life are (in chronological order): Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī-l-ta'rīkh*, ed. C. J. Tornberg, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1851-76), 12:88-100; Ibn al-Qiftī, *Ta'rīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, ed. J. Lippert (Leipzig: Dietrich'sche Verlagsbuch-handlung, 1903), pp. 227, 393-3; Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-Zamān fī Ta'rīkh al-A'yān* (Hyderabad: Maṭba' Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1951), 1:542-3; Ibn al-Shā'īr, *Uqūd al-jumān fī farā'id al-A'yān*, ed. F. Sezgin (Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Sciences, 1990), 6:107-112; al-Mundhirī, *al-Takmila li-wafayāt al-naqala*, ed. B. 'A. Ma'rūf (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1981), 2: 186-7; Abu Shāma, *al-Dhayl 'alā al-Rawḍatayn*, ed. M. Z. al-Kawtharī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Malakiyya, 1947), 68; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān wa-anbā' abnā' al-Zamān*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968-77), 4:248-52; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. S. al-Arnā'ūt (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1981-8), 21: 500-2, & *Ta'rīkh al-Islām wa wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-a'lām*, ed. U. 'A. Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987), 43:211-25; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul: Orient Institut der DMG, 1931), 4:248-58; al-Subkī, *Tabqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, op. cit., 8:81-96.

For modern Arabic biographies, one may consult: Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa-'arā'uhi al-kalāmiyya wa-l-falsafiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1963), pp. 8-36; and 'Alī Muḥammad Hasan al-'Imārī, *al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: ḥayātuhū wa Athāruhu* (United Arab Republic: al-Majlis al-A'lā li-Shū'un al-Islāmiyyah, 1969), pp. 3 - 115.

For scholarly articles and entries in Western languages, see: Frank Griffel, "On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life and the Patronage He Received," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18 (2007), pp. 313-44; Tony Street, "The Life and Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns*, ed. Peter G. Riddel and Tony Street (Brill: Leiden, 1997), pp. 135-146; M. Sagħiř ḥasan Ma'sūmī, "Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Critics," *Islamic Studies*, Vol. VI no. 4 (1967), pp. 355-74; Muammer Iskendorogulu, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 17-35.

An extremely useful index of names and subjects found in his massive *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* has also been prepared; see Michel Lagarde, *Index du Grand Commentaire de Fahr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Brill: Leiden, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Khallikān, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 252, quotes from one of the works of al-Rāzī his *isnād* of Ash'arī theology. Al-Rāzī is quoted as saying that he studied theological sciences ('ilm al-uṣūl) from his father Ḏiyā' al-Dīn 'Umar, who studied under Abū-l-Qāsim Sulayman b. Nāṣir al-Anṣārī, who studied under al-Juwainī, who studied under Abū Ishāq al-Isfrāīnī, who studied under Abū-l-Ḥusayn al-Bāhili, who was a primary student of Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī. This quote is one of many proofs that can be used to prove that al-Rāzī primarily identified himself as an Ash'arī.

latter's death. He then travelled to Nishapur in 559 A.H., to study with al-Kamāl al-Samnānī (d. 575/1179). After he returned to Rayy, he studied *falsafa* with Majd al-Dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Jīlī (d. 602/1205). It was after these studies that he then embarked on a journey to Khawārizm where he debated with the Karrāmīs. He taught in a number of cities of what is today Northern Afghanistan and Iran, such as Bamayān, Hamdhān, and Ghazna, but he spent most of his time in Herāt, where the local Ghūrid leader, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Muḥammad (d. 599/1203) had built a *madrasa* for him attached to the Great Mosque of the city. In Muḥarram of 606 (July 1209), he fell sick, and, assuming that his end was near, dictated his last 'Testament'. He passed away on the 1<sup>st</sup> of Shawwāl of the same year (29<sup>th</sup> March 1210), at the age of seventy-three or seventy-four. He has been described as being of normal stature with a portly frame, large head and a full, thick grayish beard.<sup>1</sup> His works number in the dozens.<sup>2</sup>

Although he wrote many works on *falsafa*, it was clear that he disagreed strongly with many of their views.<sup>3</sup> In his *Matālib*, many a section is dedicated to refuting specific views of the Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophers, as for example the issue of God's knowledge of particulars, denied by the philosophers but affirmed by the

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, 'Uyūn al-Anbā' (ed. Muller), p. 23 and 26.

<sup>2</sup> Zarkān, *op. cit.*, p. 62-153, discusses close to two hundred works that have been attributed to him, and attempts to sift through repeated titles and original works. He also mentions which have been printed and which remain in manuscript form. The partial list that follows is taken from Zarkān's work.

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that the philosopher al-Shahrazūrī (fl. 680/1282), in his *Nuzhat al-arwāh wa-rādat al-afrāh*, ed. 'Abd al-Karīm Abū Shuwayrib (Libya: Jam'iyyat al-Dā'wah al-Islāmiyyah al-'Alamiyyah, 1988), pp. 392-395, is so disparaging and critical of him. In places he calls him '...the poor, confused shaykh' (p. 393), in others '...and he would write works on topics regarding which he had no knowledge of their realities' (p. 395), and also, 'So, in summary, this man did not gain anything of the clandestine knowledge of the pious wise ones (*hukamā' al-mutā'allihīn*), nor did he reach the secrets of the knowledge of the ancient scholars' (p. 393).

*mutakallimūn*.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the influence that *falsafa* had on him is undeniable. He appears to have sympathized more with Platonic views than Aristotelian: most of his commentaries on the works of Ibn Sīna are more concerned with criticism and refutation than explanation.<sup>2</sup> Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūṣī (d. 672/1274) infamously remarks on al-Rāzī's 'Commentary on the *Isharāt*' that it is not a commentary on the *Ishārāt* of Ibn Sīna but rather a refutation.<sup>3</sup>

A chronological examination of the works of al-Rāzī shows that he was more influenced by philosophy in his early years than his later ones. In fact, in his last works, al-Rāzī makes a point of ascribing himself to the 'Ahl al-Sunna', and calling other Ash'arīs, "...our companions."<sup>4</sup> However, al-Rāzī could not completely distance himself from his earlier readings, and was hence also the primary Ash'arite authority responsible for the introduction and spread of logic in later *kalām* works.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on God's Knowledge of the Particulars," *Oriens*, Vol. 33 (1992), p. 133-155.

<sup>2</sup> For miscellaneous ways in which al-Rāzī was influenced by, modified, or refuted *falsafa*, see: Tony Street, "Fakhraddīn al-Rāzī's Critique of Avicennan Logic," in Dominik Perler and Ulrich Rudolph (eds.), *Logic und Theologie: Das Organon Im Arabischen und im lateinischen mittelalter* (Brill, 2005), pp. 99-115; M. E. Marmura, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Critique of an Avicennian *Tanbih*," *Historia Philosophiae medii aevi* 2 (1991), pp. 627-641; N. Heer, "Al-Rāzī and al-Ṭūṣī on Ibn Sīna's Theory of Emanation," in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought* (Albany, 1992), pp. 111-25; Y. Tzvi Langerman, "Criticism of Authority in the Writings of Moses Maimonides and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," *Early Science and Medicine*, Vol. 7 no. 3, (2002), p. 255-75; Salahuddin Kafrawi, "The Notion of Necessary Being in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Philosophical Theology," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 15 no. 1 (2004), pp. 125-133.

Two fascinating articles by Binyamin Abrahamov also demonstrate how al-Rāzī took from and then modified philosophical beliefs; the first of them is, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Philosophical Justification of Visiting Tombs," *al-Masāq*, Vol. 11 (1999), p. 109-120, and the second, "Religion versus Philosophy: The Case of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs for Prophecy," *Oriente Moderno*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2000), pp. 415-425. In the latter he also points out the possibility of al-Rāzī taking from the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, and concludes by stating (p. 425), "In sum, al-Rāzī serves as a good examples of a thinker who criticizes a theory and then becomes influenced by it. But we should notice that even in developing a philosophical theory, he remains a religious thinker."

<sup>3</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2004) p. 331.

<sup>4</sup> Zarkani, *op. cit.*, pp. 618-26, offers an interesting analysis and more examples from his major works.

<sup>5</sup> For examples of this, see Ayman Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazali to al-Rāzī," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 15 (2005), pp. 141-179; Mohd. Farid Mohd. Shahran, "A Survey of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's works on Logic and Their Influence on

### 3.2 The *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs*

#### 3.2.1 The Name of the Work and its *raison d'être*

Ibn al-Qiftī (d. 646/1248) is the first biographer of al-Rāzī to mention this work by name (along with fifty others, thus making his list the most comprehensive list of al-Rāzī's works), and it is listed as *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*.<sup>1</sup> Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a (d. 668/1270),<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328),<sup>3</sup> and al-Ṣafadī (d. 766/1363)<sup>4</sup> also referred to it with this name. Al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347) gives a more complete title, for he calls it *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs fī ta'wīl al-ṣifāt*.<sup>5</sup> This latter title is almost certainly incorrect, for not only is al-Dhahabī alone in proposing such a title, it is difficult to assume that al-Rāzī himself would unabashedly announce in the title of the work that its purpose was to reinterpret the attributes of God; it is possible that the additional wordings in the title are al-Dhahabī's descriptive phrases regarding the work.

Although it is referenced as *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs* in almost all works that mention it, the three printed editions of the work<sup>6</sup> are all published under the title *Asās al-Taqdīs*. In the sole critical edition of the work, based upon two manuscripts, al-Rāzī appears to state

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Kalām," *al-Shajarah*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2002), p. 253-83. Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah* (Franz Rosenthal tr., Princeton, 1967, v. 3, p. 52, 143, 146), also remarks that al-Rāzī was of the first to incorporate logic and philosophy into theology.

<sup>1</sup> *Tārīkh al-Hukamā'*, op. cit., p. 393. This listed is copied verbatim by Ibn al-Shā'īr (d. 695/1296) in his *Qalā'id al-jumān fī farā'id shū'arā' hadhā -l-zamān*, ed. Fuat Sezgin, (Frankfurt: Institute of Arabic-Islamic Sciences at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1990), vol. vi, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *'Uyūn al-Anbā'*, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 289. Also, he entitled his famous work refuting al-Rāzī's work *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'i him al-kalāmiyya*, which is a play-on-words of the *Ta'sīs*. We shall discuss this work in the last section of this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 255.

<sup>5</sup> *Tārīkh al-Islām*, ed. 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām al-Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1988-), vol 43, p. 213.

<sup>6</sup> See the following page for bibliographic details of these editions.

in the introduction that he has titled the work *Asās al-Taqdīs*.<sup>1</sup> However, in the footnotes, we learn that this title is only present in one manuscript; the other one states that it is *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*.<sup>2</sup> Hence, based upon the preponderance of this latter name and the fact that not a single biographer or chronicler lists the work under the title *Asās al-Taqdīs*, it can be stated that the more correct title is indeed *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*.

The book was written in order to be given as a present the Ayyūbid Sultān al-Malik al-Ādil Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb, the brother of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, who ruled from 596/1200 to 615/1218. Al-Rāzī writes that "...even though I live in the Eastern Lands, yet I saw that the people of the East and West were in unanimous agreement that the grand Sultān of Islam and the Muslims, Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb, is the best of all Sultāns... so I wished to present him with a Sunnī gift and an acceptable present. Hence I gift to him this book which I have named *Asās al-Taqdīs* (*sic*), despite the remoteness of the home and the separation of the lands."<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a mentions that the Sultan gave al-Rāzī a thousand dinars for this work.<sup>4</sup>

The work itself does not hint at a precise date or location for the writing of this work. However, since the reign of al-Malik al-Ādil began in 596/1200, and al-Rāzī mentions the praise that the ruler had received and his fame throughout the lands, it can be assumed that the work was written in the early years of the turn of the hijrī century. That it is one of al-Rāzī's later works is clearly demonstrated, not just by its

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<sup>1</sup> *Asās al-Taqdīs*, edited by Dr. Ahmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā (Cairo: *Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azharīyah*, 1986), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, footnote 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10, with slight ellipses.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem.*, 'Uyān al-Anbā', *op. cit.*, p. 39

originality and style, but also by the references to his other works.<sup>1</sup> The work has been printed three times.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Arguments of the *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*

The *Ta'sīs* is almost exclusively a work of *kalām*, with very little traces of pure *falsafa*, in contrast to some of al-Rāzī's other works, such as the *Muhaṣṣal* or the *Maṭālib*. The book, as he himself mentions, is divided into four parts (*aqsām*).<sup>3</sup>

The first part is entitled, “The Proofs that God is Exalted from Having a Body (*jismiyya*) or occupying space (*hayyiz*).” Al-Rāzī starts this part with some basic premises (*muqaddimāt*) which must be proven before beginning with the topic at hand. Of these premises is the possibility of the existence of a being which does not have any direction;<sup>4</sup> the fact that not every being must have a similitude (*naẓīr*) or likeliness (*shabīh*);<sup>5</sup> and an elucidation of the beliefs of those who claim that God is a Body (*jism*).<sup>6</sup>

After proving that God cannot have a body from a rational perspective, al-Rāzī then turns his attention to the Scriptural texts that prove that God is exalted above having a body, occupying space, or having a direction. He quotes sixteen verses from the Qur'ān,

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<sup>1</sup> On p. 37, he writes, ‘...and the explanation of this is something that we have already detailed in all of our other books’.

<sup>2</sup> The first published edition mentions no editor nor references any manuscript (Cairo: *Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Halabī wa-awlādih*, 1935). The semi-critical edition of Ahmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā’, based on two manuscripts, has already been referenced above. There is also a popular mass edition which seems to have been pirated from the al-Saqqā’ edition (Beirut: Mu’assasa al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1995). All references are to the original al-Saqqā’ edition printed in Cairo.

<sup>3</sup> *Ta'sīs*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-23, where he provides ten rational proofs for this premise.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.

one logical premise which he backs up with verses, and one ḥadīth.<sup>1</sup> For each of these verses, al-Rāzī explains how he believes it negates these attribute from God. For example, in Q. 96:19 God states, ‘...and so prostrate and come closer to Him’. Al-Rāzī explains that if God were above us, the act of prostration would actually be distancing one from God, and not vice versa.<sup>2</sup>

Once al-Rāzī has clearly proven, rationally and textually, that God can neither be a body nor be described with a direction, he then proceeds to mention six *burhāns* (indubitable proofs) that God can never occupy space (*mutahayyiz*). As an example, the second of these six states that if God occupied space, this would imply that He is finite (*mutanāhi*), and everything that is finite is possible (*mumkin*), and everything that is possible is contingent (*muḥdath*). Therefore, if He occupied space He would be created.<sup>3</sup>

The concluding parts to the first section are dedicated to proving that God neither has a specific direction nor occupies a specific space. This section is a more detailed exposition from the previous one, where he seeks to refute the belief of the Karrāmīs and Ḥanbalīs who state that God is ‘above’ the creation. He mentions a further eight *burhāns* to this effect (such as the fact that the earth is round, and if this is so then God cannot be in one specific direction, for the ‘up’ of one group of people would be the

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<sup>1</sup> The verses quoted are: Q. 112:1-3; 42:11; 47:38; 2:255; 19:65; 59:24; 57:3; 20:110; 6:103; 2:186; 6:12; 69:17; 28:88; 57:3; 96:19; 2:22. The one rational premise which he puts forth is: “If God were above us He would be the sky itself, and if He were the sky itself then He would be His own creator, and that is impossible, therefore He cannot be above us;” he then proves this with 24:43 and 25:48. The one ḥadīth that he quotes is the well-known ḥadīth of ‘Imrān b. Husayn, “There was God, and there was nothing with Him.” This, he states, proves that God has no direction, for if God were ‘above’ He must have always been ‘above’, yet if there was no creation at one point in time He could not be ‘above’. See *ibid.*, pp. 30-47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51. For each of these *burhāns*, he states basic premises and justifies them to reach the desired conclusion.

'down' of another), and also deals with the rational arguments that are set forth by those who claim that God has a direction.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, in this first part, what al-Rāzī seeks to establish is the impossibility of God being characterized with anything that would necessitate or imply that He has a body, occupies space, or has a specific direction. After laying this foundation, al-Rāzī is now able to proceed on to the next part, in which he will deal with specific texts that he believes contradict the foundations that he has established in this section.

Part two of the *Ta'sīs* – by far the largest of its four sections – deals with the interpretation of the ambiguous verses ('*mutashābihāt*') of Scripture. By way of introduction to this section, he proves the necessity of not accepting the outward (*zāhir*) meaning of the texts but rather figuratively interpreting (*ta'wīl*) some of them. After his forward begins twenty-nine chapters regarding specific Divine Attributes mentioned in the texts of the Qur'ān and Sunna which al-Rāzī feels must be interpreted figuratively (*ta'wīl*), such as: figure (*sūrah*), face (*wajh*), hand (*yad*), laughter (*dahik*), and so forth.

For each of these attributes, al-Rāzī first quotes the textual evidences from the Qur'ān or Sunna that mentions the specific Attribute, then shows why it cannot actually be understood at face value. He concludes each chapter by providing alternate understandings of each Attribute.<sup>2</sup>

To give one example, regarding God's attribute of *dahik* ('laughter'), which is mentioned in a number of ḥadīths, he states that it is not possible to assume that God

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 62-99.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 103-214

actually laughs, because, (i) God is the one who makes others laugh (as in Q. 53: 43); (ii) laughter is a temporary action that affects the skin of the face (*sunuhun yaḥsul fī jild al-wajh*) while a happiness is present in the heart, and this is impossible to presume of God; (iii) if we were to assume that God laughs, then we should also assume that He cries; and, finally, (iv) laughter is something which materializes in humans out of amazement (*ta‘ajjub*), and amazement can only occur when one is ignorant of the outcome; thus for God, who knows all things, nothing is amazing.

Based on the above, al-Rāzī states, God’s ‘laughing’ must mean something else – perhaps it means that “...if God were to laugh, then He would have laughed at this particular event,” or that ‘laughter’ here refers not to the actual act of laughing, but rather at the emotion that typically accompanies it, which is contentment and permission.<sup>1</sup>

After these chapters follows a chapter dedicated to the issue of solitary narrations (*akhbār al-āḥād*). Here, al-Rāzī brings five proofs that a solitary report (*khabar al-wāḥid*) cannot be relied upon for providing information about God’s attributes. Of these proofs, al-Rāzī states, is that scholars of ḥadīth appear to reject ḥadīths for the weakest of reasons. For example if a Shī‘ī narrator narrates a ḥadīth about the blessings of ‘Alī, it would be rejected. Yet it is absolutely amazing, al-Rāzī states, that when a narrator brings narrations which describes God in a manner which negates His Lordship, they (i.e., the scholars of ḥadīth) have no qualms about accepting it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

The final chapter of this section is, for our purposes at least, the most important section of the entire work, and is entitled, “*If rational proofs contradict apparent textual evidences, what should be done?*” In this chapter, al-Rāzī propagates his *al-Qanūn al-Kullī*, or ‘The Universal Principle,’ by which the texts of the Qur’ān and Sunna need to be understood.

Since this is the *sine qua non* of the work (and of Ibn Taymiyya’s subsequent response), it is translated here in its entirety. Al-Rāzī writes,<sup>1</sup>

Know that if indubitable rational proofs lead us to establish something, and then we find scriptural evidence whose apparent meanings appear to be at odds with that, then in this case there are four possible scenarios:

[Firstly], that both the rational proofs and Scripture be believed; but this would necessitate affirming two mutually exclusive matters, which is impossible.

[Secondly], that they both be denied; but this would necessitate denying two mutually exclusive matters, which is impossible.

[Thirdly], that the apparent meanings of the Scripture be denied, and the rational proofs be accepted.<sup>2</sup>

[Fourthly] that the apparent meanings of the Scripture be believed while the rational proofs be rejected; but this is rejected (*bātil*), for we cannot know the veracity of the apparent meanings of Scripture except by proving, through rational proofs, the existence of God, His attributes, how a miracle affirms the truth of the Prophet, and the appearance of miracles from the Prophet. So if we were to allow a fault with indubitable rational proofs, the intellect would become suspect and its testimony rejected. And if this were to be the case, then it would also not be acceptable to prove these [religious] foundations. And if we cannot

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<sup>1</sup> *Ta’sīs al-taqdīs*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> This third point is missing from my edition; however, it is found in the edition of Dr. al-Saqqā (p. 193), who references this line as being present in the manuscript of the work found in the Cairo’s Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya.

prove these foundations, then Scriptural evidences lose their characteristic of being useful (*mufīda*). So, it is proven that imputing defects [to the intellect] in order to verify Scripture actually leads to imputing defects on *both* rationality and Scripture at the same time, and this is rejected!

Therefore, when all four possibilities have been rejected, nothing remains except to affirm what the rational proofs necessitate, which is: to either claim that these Scriptural evidences are not authentic, or to claim that they are indeed authentic but what is intended is other than their apparent meanings. Then, if we consider allegorical interpretation (*ta’wīl*) to be permissible, we will, in a voluntary manner (*‘alā sabīl al-tabarrū’*), exert ourselves in discovering, in great detail, these interpretations. And if we do not consider allegorical interpretation permissible, we leave their knowledge to God (*fawwadnā al-‘ilm bihā ila-llāh*).

This, therefore, is the ‘Universal Principal’ (*al-Qānūn al-Kullī*) which is referred to in all unclear matters (*al-mutashābihāt*), and God is the guarantor of success!

In the third part of his work, al-Rāzī examines the belief of the early generations (*salaf*). Al-Rāzī first asks the question, “Is it possible that the Qur’ān contains matters that we will never understand?” Here al-Rāzī gives evidences supporting both sides, but as far as one can tell remains ambivalent about his own opinion. He then proceeds to prove that the Qur’ān is composed of both ‘clear’ (*muhkam*) and ‘unclear’ (*mutashābih*) verses, and discusses the exact definition of these two terms, and how a verse is known to be one or the other.<sup>1</sup> After these introductions, he expounds on the belief of the *salaf*, which was to leave the precise meanings of the Attributes to God, without pondering over what they actually meant.

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<sup>1</sup> In his *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2001), vol. 3, pp. 137-148, there is a much more detailed discussion of the *muhkam* and *mutashābih* verses. Also see: Salahudin Kafrawi, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Sources of *Ta’wīl* Between Reason and Revelation,” *The Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 3, (1999), pp. 188-199, where he summarizes al-Rāzī’s stance; and Murtada A. Muhibbu-Din, “Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Philosophical Theology in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*,” *Hamard Islamicus*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1994), pp. 74-77, who looks at it this issue light of his *Tafsīr*.

In this section, therefore, al-Rāzī is attempting to prove the continuity of the Ash‘arī tradition, claiming that it falls squarely within the understanding of the *salaf*. By this, he is indirectly refuting the Ḥanbalīs and their claim of following the *salaf*, and insinuates that the Ḥanbalī ‘literal’ understanding of these Attributes in fact contravenes the beliefs of the actual *salaf*.

In the final part of the book, al-Rāzī concludes the work with three miscellaneous issues. Firstly, he explains the wisdom of mentioning ambiguous verses (*mutashābihāt*), which include the fact that the existence of such ambiguous passages makes the Qur’ān more difficult to understand, and hence more rewarding when the scholar puts in the effort to understand them. For al-Rāzī, one of the main tasks of the scholar of *kalām* is to mention such verses and properly explain them to the masses.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, al-Rāzī asks whether one who affirms that God has a body (*al-mujassim*) may also be described as an anthropomorphist (*al-mushabbih*)? In response to this question, al-Rāzī presents over twenty-five evidences from those who affirm a body to God that they do *not*, by doing so, intend to liken God to the creation (*tashbīh*). However, after mentioning these evidences in detail, he concludes by stating that the mere affirmation of a body (*jism*) to God is sufficient to level the charge of likening Him to the creation, and this is due to all of the principles that have preceded in the earlier parts of the book.<sup>2</sup>

The last issue that al-Rāzī discusses is the religious status of one who affirms God is a body occupying space and with a direction: is he a disbeliever or not? He states that

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

scholars have two opinions on the issue, but the one that seems more apparent is that he is indeed a disbeliever, for the affirmation of any one of these issues necessitates, in his eyes, that God is created. He also states that the anthropomorphists (*mujassima*) are worse than the Mu'tazilīs, and – in this work at least – does not pronounce the latter as being outside the fold of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

### ***3.3 The Theological Development of the ‘Universal Principle’***

The political ascension of the Ash'arīs also coincided with the evolution of Ash'arī theology.<sup>2</sup> In this section, we will concentrate, in particular, on the development of a working relationship between ‘reason’ and ‘revelation’ in Ash'arī thought, thereby contextualizing the background from which Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's ‘Universal Principle’ developed.

#### **3.3.1 From al-Ash'arī to al-Juwainī**

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī himself, in his surviving works, does not seem to have used any rational premise as an explicit basis with which to re-interpret the outward meaning of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> However, he did theoretically allow for the possibility of an indubitable evidence (which he termed *hujja*) as being strong enough to avert the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup> In my MA thesis, *Maqālāt al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān*, I documented in detail the evolution of Ash'arī thought in the areas of epistemology (vol. 1, pp. 181–91); faith and sin (vol. 1, pp. 267–94); proofs for God's existence (vol. 1, pp. 360–75); understanding the Divine Attributes (vol. 2, pp. 584–613); and predestination (vol. 2, pp. 782–811). The four main figures of Ash'arī thought are clearly the eponymous founder, followed by al-Bāqillānī, then al-Juwainī, and finally al-Rāzī. Al-Ghazālī, despite his fame in other fields, does not seem to have played a major role in the development or codification of Ash'arī thought. The gradual evolution of Ash'arī doctrine is a topic worthy of further research.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, in many sections of his *al-Ibānah 'an uṣūl al-diyānah*, ed. Bashīr Muḥammad 'Uyūn (Riyad: Maktabah al-Mu'ayyid, 1993), he quite severely rebukes the Mu'tazilīs and Jahmīs for their abandonment of the outward meaning of the Qur'an and their rejection of prophetic traditions based upon purely ‘rational’ premises; see for example, pp. 61, 98, 104–5. As mentioned previously, this work is atypical of al-Ash'arī's other works.

outward meaning (*zāhir*) of the Qur’ān.<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that he was a pure traditionalist. His *Luma'* is clearly a rational-based theological *summa* which shows a highly developed and sophisticated tradition of thought and assumes the validity of speculation and reasoning in matters of theology.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps his most explicit work on this subject is his *Risāla fī istihsān al-khwāḍ*, in which he attempts to justify speculative theology as being something commendable and not heretical, as his Ḥanbalī critics had charged him with.<sup>3</sup> Even in this work, however, he attempts to justify *kalām* as simply being an *extension* of Qur’ānic paradigms. Al-Ash‘arī argues that the mere use of *kalām*-terms such as ‘accidents’ and ‘bodies’ is simply keeping with the times – had the Prophet been alive, he reasons, and these modern controversies erupted, he too would have been speaking utilizing such terminology. This line of defense clearly does not see any inherent contradiction between reason and revelation.<sup>4</sup> It appears that overall, al-Ash‘arī was hesitant to allow for the Divine Revelation to be considered secondary to any other source; in this, he was more prone to give Scripture greater weight than the intellect, in contrast to other early followers of Ibn Kullāb, who gave more weight to intellect than Scripture.<sup>5</sup>

The second generation of Ash‘arīs, such as Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), continued to rely heavily upon Scriptural evidences to prove their points, and, even when claiming

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<sup>1</sup> *al-Ibānah*, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> See in particular: R. M. Frank, “The *Kalām*: An Art of Contradiction-Making or Theological Science,” pp. 301-3.

<sup>3</sup> R. M. Frank, “The *Kalām*: An Art of Contradiction-Making or Theological Science,” p. 308.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī remarks that Abū ‘Alī al-Thaqafī, an early Kullābī, would give more weight to intellectual sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-naẓariyya*) over Scriptural ones (which he calls ‘*al-‘ulūm al-hissiyya*’). See: al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 10.

that certain texts could not be understood ‘literally’, did not explicitly state that the sole reason for this was a perceived conflict between reason and Scripture. As an example of this, in his *al-Insāf fī mā yajibū i‘tiqāduhū* (‘The Fair Criterion Regarding What Must Be Believed In’), Ibn Fūrak brings forth five prophetic traditions that appear to contradict an Ash‘arī theological premise (in this case, that God speaks with a voice that cannot be heard). For each of these traditions, he tries to explain that it does not contradict his premise, but nowhere does he actually reject the tradition, either by claiming that it contradicts reason or by claiming that it is singular (*āḥād*) and hence cannot be used in matters of theology.<sup>1</sup>

Such hesitancy during this early stage may be attributed to the fact that a direct rejection of what was perceived to be Qur‘ānic text or prophetic ḥadīth would be intellectually and theologically unacceptable from those who professed Sunnism. Rather, such a claim was a hallmark of the rationalist Mu‘tazilīs, and it would have been anathema for the Ash‘arīs to admit any commonality with them, for their entire *raison d'être* was to oppose and refute Mu‘tazilism.

The next generation of Ash‘arī theologians, however, became more emboldened in their dependence on rationality, and it is in this generation that we find the first explicit limitations on the acceptance of Scripture. As an example, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) appears to be the first Ash‘arī to posit that solitary prophetic narrations (*āḥād* ḥadīth) could not be accepted in the face of intellectual proofs. He writes, “If the apparent meaning of what a trustworthy narrator narrates to us causes alarm to the intellect, yet it has an acceptable interpretation (*ta’wīl*) that conforms with

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Fūrak, *al-Insāf fī ma yajibū i‘tiqāduhū*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: Matkaba al-Azhariyya, 2000), pp. 120–125.

intellectual premises, then in this case we shall accept his narration and interpret it in such a manner as to conform with intellect.”<sup>1</sup> Al-Shīrāzī (d. 476/1083) also mentions prophetic texts that seem to suggest anthropomorphic understandings of God, and says that it is simply impossible to affirm them at face value, without interpretation, since this would imply that God is created. An example of this is the Divine Attribute of *istiwā’*; after providing a number of possible interpretations without concluding with any specific one, he states that as long as it is not taken at face value, it is not required to understand anything more than that.<sup>2</sup>

In the interim between al-Baghdādī and al-Rāzī, two more theologians laid the groundwork for the final phase. The first of these was al-Juwainī, who broadened both the scope and the functionality of the application of logical premises against problematic texts. In his seminal work on Ash‘arī theology, he wrote that an intellectual proof had the authority to trump any prophetic tradition.<sup>3</sup> In another work, he categorizes issues of theology into three areas: those which the intellect alone can arrive at; those which Scripture alone can inform us of; and those which both intellect and Scripture can be used. However, he clarifies that if anything is seemingly asserted by Scripture which the intellect deems impossible, then in this case ‘...it must be rejected without a doubt, since the Divine Law will never contradict intellect.’<sup>4</sup> While the bluntness of such statements is unprecedented, al-Juwainī seems to have remarked them in passing, and does not elaborate nor give examples to what he is referring to. It

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<sup>1</sup> al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> al-Shirāzī *al-Ishāra*, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup> al-Juwainī, *Al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Alexandria: Dār al-‘Arab, 1959), v. 1, pp. 31-35.

<sup>4</sup> al-Juwainī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, ed. As‘ad Tamīm (Beirut: Mu’assah al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1996), p. 302.

was also around the time of al-Juwainī that the Ash‘arī movement appears to have first been influenced by *falsafa*, and in particular the thought of Ibn Sīna.<sup>1</sup>

The second theologian during this era was al-Juwainī’s prime student, none other than Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111).

### 3.3.2 Enter al-Ghazālī

It was al-Ghazālī who truly set the stage for the formulation of al-Rāzī’s ‘Universal Principle.’ Moreover, a strong case can be made to argue that he was the actual formulator of the law, and all al-Rāzī did was to frame it in simpler and more precise terms.<sup>2</sup>

According to al-Ghazālī, an indubitable proof (*burhān*) cannot be repudiated because of the apparent meanings of a Sacred Text; rather, the apparent meanings must be forced to conform (*yutasallat*) to the intellectual proof by means of interpretation (*ta’wīl*).<sup>3</sup> He divides passages from the Qur’ān and prophetic traditions into three categories. In the first, there exists a *burhān* which clearly shows that the apparent meanings of the text cannot be affirmed. For al-Ghazālī, it is not that rational proofs have a higher authority than revelation, but rather that intellect requires of us to *understand* revelation in a certain manner.<sup>4</sup> The second category of passages are

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<sup>1</sup> R. Wisnovsky, “One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Islam,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 14 (2004), pp. 65-100; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, pp. 29-30. Wisnovsky (see esp. p.90) documents the introduction of Avicennian concepts, such as *wājib al-wujūb*, to the middle of the eleventh century, and in particular in the writings of al-Juwainī and al-Ghazālī; Griffel (p. 30) points out the effect that the *falsifa* had on Ash‘arī proofs for the existence of God.

<sup>2</sup> See: Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, pp. 111-6, for an overview of al-Ghazālī’s views on reconciling reason and revelation.

<sup>3</sup> *Ma‘ārij al-qudus fi madārij ma‘rifat al-nafs* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyah al-Kubrā, 1963), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, p. 115.

those in which there exists no demonstrative proof to the contrary; passages of a legal or historical nature would come under this category. These must be accepted at face value, without interpretation. The final category consists of those passages in which no possible *burhān* could exist to contradict the information conveyed by revelation; for example, statements regarding the afterlife and the rewards and punishments found therein. These as well must be affirmed, and in fact, according to al-Ghazālī, to deny them is tantamount to disbelief.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, according to al-Ghazālī, one must understand revelation in light of what can or cannot be demonstrably proven.

In an entire work dedicated to the subject, the *Qānūn al-kullī fi-l-ta'wīl* ('The Universal Principle Regarding Reinterpretation'), al-Ghazālī deals almost exclusively with the issue of the conflict between reason and revelation. In this work, al-Ghazālī states that at first glance, there is a clear dissonance between reason and intellect, and divides the stances that scholars take with regards to this dissonance into five camps. The two extreme camps are those who ignore intellect completely and rely on Scripture, and those who ignore Scripture completely and rely on reason. The third group are those who made reason the basis (*asl*), and then looked at Scripture based upon reason. The problem with this, al-Ghazālī states, is that it will inevitably lead to a rejection of many authentic ḥadīths without any legitimate basis for such a rejection. The fourth group are those who took the Scripture as the basis, but were not very skilled in the arts of reason, hence were not able to deny impossibilities (*istiḥālāt*) from God, such as His being in a direction (*jiha*). The fifth and final group are those who posit

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<sup>1</sup> Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 115-6.

the moderate and correct doctrine of taking *both* reason and Scripture as an important basis (*asl muhimm*). He writes,<sup>1</sup>

...whoever belies intellect has indeed belied the Divine Law, for it is only through reason that the Divine Law is acknowledged to be valid, for were it not for the veracity of intellectual proofs we would never be able to tell the difference between a true and false prophet, or between a truthful person and a liar. So how can the intellect be belied on the basis of the Divine Law while the Divine Law is only affirmed via the intellect?!

To illustrate this point, al-Ghazālī states that if it is clear that the intellect must be believed, then it is simply impossible to doubt the fact that God cannot be described with a direction (*jiha*) or a figure (*ṣūra*).<sup>2</sup>

To conclude this section, it is quite apparent that al-Ghazālī's passages and themes were vital in al-Rāzī's writing of the *Ta'sīs* and in his formation of the 'Universal Law.' The five categories that al-Ghazālī posited were rehashed into al-Rāzī's four possibilities. And the two primary concepts that al-Ghazālī negated in God (a 'direction' and 'figure') were then taken as material for al-Rāzī's introductory chapter, in which these premises are indubitably established. In fact, even the title of the tract (*al-Qānūn al-kullī fi-al-ta'wīl*) was borrowed by al-Rāzī and appended to his one-paragraph formulation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Qānūn al-Ta'wīl*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Azhariyyah li-turāth, 2006) pp. 7-10. On the next page, he writes "...indubitable intellectual proofs never be denied, for the intellect can never be at fault. For if the intellect is at fault, it is possible that it was at fault when it confirmed the Divine Law, for it was only through it (i.e., the intellect) that we knew [the authenticity] of the Divine Law. So how is it possible that the veracity of a witness is affirmed by the testimony of a lying referee? The Divine Law is the witness that gives the details, and the intellect is the referee that approves the Divine Law." Also see his *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa-l-zandaqah*, ed. Maḥmūd Bījū (Damascus, 1993), pp. 47-50 for a similar passage, where he proposed a 'Qānūn' for understanding 'problematic' texts.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

We thus see a gradual increase in the role that rationality played in deriving Ash‘arī thought. Earlier Ash‘arīs were hesitant to explicitly discard the meanings of Scripture based on rational premises, presumably for fear of being castigated for the very charges that they accused the rationalist Mu‘tazilīs of falling into. But as the power and dominance of Mu‘tazilī thought began to wane, Ash‘arī theologians became more emboldened and allowed themselves to explore the logical consequences of their premises. Hence, we discover that later theologians began to verbalize what earlier ones did not (many times actually contradicting them). Concomitantly with the Mu‘tazilī decline, the Ash‘arīs – almost subconsciously – began to search for a new ‘other’ in order to better define themselves, and this ‘other’ was the *Ahl al-Hadīth*.<sup>1</sup>

It is, therefore, apparent that al-Rāzī’s thought was the culmination of over four centuries of Ash‘arī theological development. Although he was by no means the first theologian to try to defend or codify Ash‘arī theology, he did succeed in succinctly and systematically presenting the logical and theological justifications for Ash‘arī *kalām*. No scholar before him was able to present a holistic and integrated framework upon which the entire edifice of Ash‘arī theology could be structured, and his *Ta’sīs al-Taqdīs* is perhaps his most structured attempt.

It is for this reason that it was chosen by the greatest Ḥanbalī theologian of medieval Islam, who wrote, not one, but two large works (and possibly a third smaller one) refuting it.

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<sup>1</sup> What buttresses this thesis is the fact that the earlier theological texts of the Ash‘arīs direct their most vituperative language against the Mu‘tazilīs, (see, for example, Y. Ibish, *The Political Doctrines of al-Baqillani*, p. 26-7) but later ones, including al-Rāzī, seem to be concerned only with the *Ahl al-Hadīth*, going so far (as in the final pages of his *Ta’sīs*) of actually declaring them to be outside the pale of Islam due to their ‘anthropomorphic’ beliefs.

## *4. Ibn Taymiyya and the Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ*

### *4.1 The Life of Ibn Taymiyya*

Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Ḥalīm b. 'Abd al-Salām b. al-Khaḍīr, commonly known as Ibn Taymiyya al-Harrānī, (or simply 'Shaykh al-Islām' to his followers) was born in the ancient city of Harrān, in 661/1263.<sup>1</sup> At a young age, his parents were forced to flee to Damascus to evade the invading Mongols, and it was in Damascus that Ibn Taymiyya studied, taught, and eventually died. Ibn Taymiyya came from a family of scholars; his grandfather 'Abd al-Salām was one of the most famous Ḥanbalī scholars of his time,<sup>2</sup> while his father 'Abd al-Ḥalīm eventually ended up teaching Ḥanbalī *fiqh* at the Grand Mosque of Damascus. Ibn Taymiyya started attending the lectures of the local scholars from an early age, and it was only a matter of time before his precociousness was demonstrated, both by his speeches and in his writings.

Ibn Taymiyya soon emerged as a champion of what he perceived to be orthodox Islam (which he termed *Ahl al-Sunna*, or *Sunnī*), defending its doctrines against a myriad

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<sup>1</sup> There are numerous articles and works that summarize Ibn Taymiyya's life, times, and thought, hence the reader is referred to these sources for a more complete biography: Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les les doctrines sociales et politiques de Taqī-d-Dīn Ahmad b. Taimīya*, (Le Caire, Impr. de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1939); Laoust's entry in *EI2*, s.v. 'Ibn Taymiyya'; Victor E. Makari, *Ibn Taymiyya's ethics : the social factor* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983); Yahya Michot, *Muslims Under non-Muslim Rule: Ibn Taymiyya* (Oxford: Interface Publications, 2006), pp. 149–169; Makdisi, George. "Ibn Taymīyah." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2 ed. Vol. 6, ed. Lindsay Jones, 4276–4279 (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005).

The most comprehensive collection of biographies, spanning seventy five entries over seven centuries, is: M. Shams and 'A. al-'Imrān, *al-Jāmi' li-sīrat Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyya khilāl sab'at qurūn* (Mecca: Dār 'Alīm al-Fawā'id, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Of his writings is *Muntahā al-Akhbār*, a popular work of legal ḥadīth, which was subsequently commented upon by the Yemeni scholar Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Shawkānī (d. 1250/1834) in his famous work *Nayl al-Awṭār*; this in turn had a profound impact on many subsequent revivalist movements, especially in the Indian sub-continent. See Bernard Haykel, *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muḥammad al-Shawkānī* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 190–233.

of ideas that were deemed by him to be heretical and foreign. Hardly any systematic theology escaped unscathed from the pen or tongue of this intellectual giant: from Neo-Platonic and Hellenist *mutakallimūn*, to monist and antinomian mystics, from pseudo-philosophers (*mutafalsifa*) to wandering *Ṣūfīs* (*fuqarā' al-Ṣūfiyyah*), from errant leaders to misguiding or indolent scholars, all were judged by the mighty and infallible scales of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth as understood by the earliest generations. Throughout all such critiques, there was a very clear and pronounced self-identification with the '*salaf*', the earliest generations of Islam, whom he viewed as being praised and praiseworthy – praised by God and His Messenger, and praiseworthy due to their fealty to the pure understanding of Scripture.

By the time Ibn Taymiyya died on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Dhū'l-Qa'da 728/9<sup>th</sup> September 1328, his career resume was impressive by any standards. He had fought against the Mongols, nurtured a network of high-profile students, cultivated an even broader spectrum of enemies, been imprisoned three times, authored close to one hundred works that, in modern print, fill up more than five dozen volumes, and left behind a profound legacy that continues to intimately shape and affect the Muslim world to this day.

Ibn Taymiyya lived through one of the most intellectually stimulating and rich periods of medieval Islam. His birth in 661/1263 was preceded by one of the most significant, and perhaps most traumatic, incidents in Islamic history: the attack of the Mongols on Muslim lands and the eventual sack of Baghdad under the leadership of Hülegü Khan in 656/1258. Never in the six centuries since the birth of Islam had so much been lost so quickly. It appeared to many at the time, historians and theologians alike, that the end of the world was nigh.

And for a while it did indeed seem that the Mongols would devour the entire Muslim world. But, just as they were preparing to cross over to attack the westernmost lands of Islam in Africa, the Mongols suffered a resounding defeat in the Battle of 'Ayn Jālūt in 658/1260, against a hitherto obscure dynasty composed of ex-slaves (*mamlūks*).

The genesis of the Mamlūk dynasty had begun a generation earlier, when the Ayyūbid ruler of Egypt, Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (d. 648/1249), decided to import an elite force of personal bodyguard composed of Qipchak Turks.<sup>1</sup> This Turkic group managed, through assassination, intrigue and marriage, to oust the Ayyūbids and place themselves in political control of Egypt. The defeat of the Mongols at 'Ayn Jālūt boosted their credentials in the Muslim world, and, with this newly-acquired prestige, they managed to coax a survivor of the 'Abbāsid dynasty to establish a shadow caliphate in Cairo. Henceforth, while the titular Caliph would be 'Abbāsid, all power would actually be in the hands of the Mamlūk Sultān. The Mamlūks continued to host the shadow-caliph in their midst (and hence occupy center-stage in Muslim history) until they were overthrown by the Ottoman Empire in 1517.<sup>2</sup>

With this new status of the Mamlūks, the intellectual capital of the Muslim world now shifted from Baghdad to the two centers of Damascus and Cairo. Thus, the birth of

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<sup>1</sup> For this section, see: *EI2*, s.v. 'Mamluks'; Linda S. Northrup, "The Bahri Mamluk Sultanate," in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 246-7; David Ayalon, *Islam and the Abode of War* (Brookfield: Variorum, 1994), pp. 43-4; Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 17-20, 39-45, 71-77. One of the most comprehensive bibliographies of Mamlūk studies, an on-line project, is accessible here: <http://mamluk.lib.uchicago.edu/> (last accessed Feb 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> David Ayalon, "Studies on the Transfer of the Abbasid Caliphate from Bagdad to Cairo," in David Ayalon, *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt* (Variorum, 1977), article IX.

Ibn Taymiyya for all practical purposes coincided with the birth of the Mamlūk era (or, to be more precise, the birth of the *Bahrī* Mamlūks as opposed to the *Burjī* Mamlūks<sup>1</sup>).

Although the Mamlūks still faced much pressure from the Mongol Īl-Khāns in the East (and, to a lesser extent, the remnants of the Frankish states in Syria), by and large they were able to maintain a strong, internal stability of regimes in Egypt and most parts of Syria. The Mamlūks appeared to have benefitted from and significantly adopted the governmental policies of the Īl-Khānids. Most of the land and property were taken over as ‘military fiefs’ in the hands of a dominant foreign group (*viz.*, the Mamlūk bureaucracy), while the *muftīs*, *qādīs*, and ‘*ulamā*’ were recognized on the somewhat analogous lines of public and private *waqfs*. The military was paid through the *iqtā‘* system and the scholars through the *waqfs*. During this time, large holdings of agriculture land and urban real estate became available for religious education and charitable purposes. The military was completely in the control of the Mamlūk regiments (composed of Turkic imports), and most of the civil offices that weren’t taken over directly by the Mamlūks remained in the hands of the Copts and Jews (as had been the case in the Ayyūbid era). Since an academic learning of the classical sciences was one of the only ways in which a native Egyptian could attain high office, it naturally followed that intellectual life flourished under these early Mamlūks.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the two terms ‘*bahrī*’ and ‘*burjī*’ see: David Ayalon, “*Bahrī* Mamlūks, *Burjī* Mamlūks: Inadequate Names for the Two Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultānate,” in David Ayalon, *Islam and The Abode of War op. cit.*, article IV.

<sup>2</sup> Bertold Spuler, *The Muslim World II: The Mongol Period*, tr. F. R. C. Bagley (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), p. 57-58; Amitai-Preiss, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-3, 230. See also: Carl F. Petry, “Late Mamlūk military institution and innovation,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. Carl F. Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 473; David Ayalon, “Studies on the Structure of the Mamlūk Army,” parts I-III, in David Ayalon, ed., *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt* (Variorum, 1977).

It was in this era that the towering personality of Ibn Taymiyya prospered. Ibn Taymiyya himself never directly challenged the political power of the Mamlūks; in fact he interacted positively with a number of Mamlūk Sultans, in particular al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalawūn, who reigned, with broken intervals, from 692 to 741 (1293 to 1341).<sup>1</sup>

A modern researcher sums up the intellectual climate and its effect on Ibn Taymiyya as follows:

[t]he consciousness of having been spared the pagan yoke of the vile Mongol foe produced a sentiment of rigorous fealty to the traditional social and legal norms in their Arab and orthodox garb - thus one may well formulate the doctrine not only of Ibn Taymiyya, the great religious thinker of early Mamlūk times, but of social and legal thought in the Mamlūk period at large.<sup>2</sup>

His writings are too numerous and varied to state with certainty which one would qualify as his *magnum opus* (some would even claim that he authored a number of *magna opera*), but one of the finalists on any serious researcher's list would be the multi-volume work entitled *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* ('Averting the Conflict Between Reason and Scripture').

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<sup>1</sup> For al-Malik al-Nāṣir, see: *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, ed. Carl Petry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 251-7; Donald P. Little, *An Introduction to Mamlūk Historiography*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1970); Amalia Levanoni, *A turning point in Mamluk history: the third reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995); Hayat Nasser al-Hajjī, *The internal affairs in Egypt during the third reign of Sultān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn* (Kuwait: Kuwait University, 2000). The earliest original biography is by Shams al-Dīn al-Shujā'ī, *Tārīkh al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalawūn al-Ṣālihi wa Awlādūhū*, ed. Barbara Scheifer (Franz Steiner, 1978). It was also during the reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir that the *waqf* system reached its peak; see Hayāt Nasser al-Hajjī, *al-Sultān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalawūn wa niẓām al-waqffī 'ahdihī* (Kuwait: Maktabah al-Falah, 1983), p. 156; Howayda al-Hārithy, "The Patronage of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalawūn 1310-1341," *Mamlūk Studies Review IV* (2000), pp. 219-245.

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Haarmann, "Rather the Injustice of the Turks than the Righteousness of the Arabs: Changing 'Ulamā' Attitudes Towards Mamlūk Rule in the Late Fifteenth Century," *Studia Islamica* 68 (1988), pp. 61-62.

## 4.2 The *Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ*

### 4.2.1 The Name of the Work

The *Dar'* has been referenced by Ibn Taymiyya himself in his other writings. The most common name that he uses for the work is *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* ('Averting the Conflict of Reason with Scripture').<sup>1</sup> It is also mentioned as *Man' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* ('Preventing the Conflict of Reason with Scripture'),<sup>2</sup> or as *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql bi-l-shar'* ('Averting the Conflict of Reason with the Revealed Law').<sup>3</sup>

Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350), undoubtedly Ibn Taymiyya's most devoted disciple, lists this work in his catalog of Ibn Taymiyya's works with the same title of *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*.<sup>4</sup> However, in another work of his, he gives it the title *Bayān muwāfaqat al-'aql al-ṣariḥ li-l-naql al-ṣahīḥ* ('An Elucidation of the Agreement of Clear Reason with Authentic Scripture').<sup>5</sup> Al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347) refers to it as *Muwāfaqa bayn al-ma'qūl wa-l-manqūl* ('The Reconciling Between the Intelligible and the Transmitted'), to which

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, his epistle on the exegesis of Sūrah 80 ('Abasa), in *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, v. 16, p. 432; his *al-Ṣafadiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad Rashed Sālim (Riyad: Dār al-Faḍīlah, 2000), p. 112 and 208; his *al-Radd 'alā al-mantiqiyīn*, ed. Muhammad Ḥasan Ismā'īl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2003), p. 284; his *al-Furqān bayna awliyā' al-rahmān wa awliyā' al-shayṭān*, ed. 'Amir al-Najjār (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyah, 2006), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al-Nubuwa*, ed. Dr. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Tuwayyān (Riyad: Maktaba Aḍwā al-Salaf, 2000), p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣahīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ*, ed. 'Alī b. Ḥasan b. Nāṣir, et. al., (Riyad: Dār al-'Āsimah, 1999), v. 5, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Shams al-Dīn ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Asmā mu'alfat ibn Taymiyya*, ed., Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Damascus, 1953), p. 53. In his *al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah* (v. 1, p. 247 of the *Mukhtaṣar*), Ibn al-Qayyim quotes extensively from the work, and calls it 'a voluminous book'. Note that the attribution of *Asmā mu'alfat ibn Taymiyya* to Ibn al-Qayyim is disputed.

<sup>5</sup> Shams al-Dīn ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Tarīq al-hijratayn wa bāb al-sa'ādatayn*, ed. 'Umar b. Maḥmūd (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Qayyim, 1994), p. 248. In this passage, he also extols the book and states, "...this is a work the likes of which the world has not seen anything similar to in its field, for he [viz, Ibn Taymiyya] destroyed the very foundations of the heretical groups to such an extent that their roofs fell on their heads. And he fortified the foundations of the *Ahl al-Sunna* and ḥadīth, and built it and raised its flag and implanted it with all different evidences that truth is proven with: from the intellect, and Scripture, and *fitrāh* and common sense (*al-'itibār*). And so he came forth with a book that no sincere person of knowledge can afford to be without...". *Ibid*, p. 248.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), another devotee of the Shaykh, adds, “This book, which is in fact *Dar’ ta‘ārud al-‘aql wa-l-naql*, is in four large volumes, and some transcriptions of it are in more than four volumes, and it is a comprehensive, grand work in which the Shaykh refuted the *falāsifa* and the *mutakallimīn*.<sup>1</sup> Based on all that has preceded, it does appear that the title of *Dar’ ta‘ārud al-‘aql wa-l-naql* is the strongest candidate for the title of this work.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4.2.2. The Date of Writing of the Work**

As with most works of Ibn Taymiyya, it is almost impossible to date the writing of the *Dar’* with precision. The quotes above clearly demonstrate that Ibn Taymiyya wrote many works after writing the *Dar’*. Of particular interest is that he wrote two of his most voluminous works after the *Dar’*: his critique of Christianity, the *al-Jawāb al-ṣāḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ* (‘The Correct Response to Those Who Changed the Religion of the Christ’) which, in its latest edition, is printed in seven volumes, and his polemical work against Shī‘ism, the *Minhāj al-Sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqd kalām al-shī‘a al-qadariyya* (‘The Explanation of the Prophetic Sunna in Refuting the Speech of the Shī‘is and Qadarīs’) which, in its latest edition, is printed in nine volumes. This would indicate that the *Dar’* was by no means the last of his major writings.

Due to a number of fortuitous comments in the *Dar’* itself, however, it is possible to ascertain at least some margin of dates regarding the years of its authorship. Very early in this work, Ibn Taymiyya comments on the fact that he had written another

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Al-‘Uqūd al-Durriyyah*, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> It should of course be borne in mind that it was common for books written in that era to have more than one title, and that these titles were meant to be descriptive of the work’s content. Hence the fact that Ibn Taymiyya or Ibn al-Qayyim referred to this work with multiple titles should not be problematic.

work refuting Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s belief that textual evidences cannot be used in establishing foundational theological premises. This work, he writes, was written “...over thirty years ago;”<sup>1</sup> this would clearly place the writing of the *Dar’* in the latter part of Ibn Taymiyya’s life. Two pages after this tidbit, he supplies us with another, for he states that “...when I was in the land of Egypt, some of its noblemen asked me regarding [an] issue.”<sup>2</sup> We know that Ibn Taymiyya was exiled to Egypt between the years of 705 to 712, and he returned to Damascus in the month of Dhu-l-Qa‘da 712/March 1313.<sup>3</sup> Hence, since the reference to Egypt is in the past tense, the work must have been written in Damascus after this date.

There is one final clue that can help us narrow this window further. Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī (d. 744/1343), a devoted disciple and one of the earliest biographers of Ibn Taymiyya, tells us that Ibn Taymiyya wrote a one-volume work *after* completing the *Dar’* in which he refuted a certain Kamāl al-Dīn b. al-Sharīshī’s critique of the *Dar’*.<sup>4</sup> Although this work, which Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī does not name, appears to be lost (along with the critique), the death-date of al-Sharīshī provides an important piece of this puzzle. This al-Sharīshī turns out to be a Damascene contemporary of Ibn Taymiyya, a

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<sup>1</sup> *Dar’ ta’ārud al-‘aql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Riyāḍ: Jāmi‘at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd al-Islāmīyah, 1979–1981), v. 1, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* v. 1, p. 25. The issue that he was asked was regarding whether it was permissible to delve into theological disputes regarding issues that were not explicitly found in the Sacred Texts.

<sup>3</sup> See: Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Hādī, *al-‘Uqūd al-Durriyyah min Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām ibn Taymiyya*, ed. Ṭalāt b. Fu’ād al-Ḥalwānī (Cairo: al-Fāruq al-Ḥadītha li-ṭ-bā’ah wa-l-nashr, 2002), p. 228.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *ibid.*, p. 24.

Shāfi‘ī jurist and an expert in linguistics, who, we are told, died on the way to Hijāz in Shawwāl 718/November 1318.<sup>1</sup>

With this piece of information, we can now assume that the work was written sometime between 713/1313 (the date of Ibn Taymiyya’s return to Damascus) and 717/1317 (before the death of al-Sharīshī), for it is only logical to assume that al-Sharīshī must have read the *Dar’* in its entirety and had some time to comment on it before his trip to the Hijāz.<sup>2</sup> Hence, Ibn Taymiyya would have been in his mid-fifties when he wrote the *Dar’*. As mentioned earlier, this was not by any means his last major work, for he wrote, *inter alia*, the *Jawāb* and the *Minhāj* after the *Dar’*.

#### 4.2.3 The Printings of the Work

The *Dar’* was first printed in 1322/1904, in the margins of *Minhāj al-Sunna*, which, as mentioned earlier, is Ibn Taymiyya’s most important polemical work against the Shī‘īs.<sup>3</sup> Why the editor chose to combine these particular books in one printing is not clear. This edition relied on an incomplete and extremely faulty manuscript of the *Dar’*, hence less than one-third of the actual work was reproduced. From this version, which was printed in the outlying margins of the *Minhāj*, another edition was extracted and published in 1370/1950, but since it was copied from the first edition, it suffered from the same flaws and contained the same errors.

It was shortly after this, in 1956, that a young Egyptian graduate student at Cambridge, by the name of Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, decided to write his doctoral

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<sup>1</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥajr al-‘Asqlānī, *al-Durar al-Kāminah*, ed. Dr. Sālim al-Karnakawī (no publishing details), v. 1, p. 252. His full name is Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Jamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Sharīshī al-Wābilī al-Shāfi‘ī.

<sup>2</sup> See the editor’s comments in the Introduction to the *Dar’*, v. 1, pp. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Minhāj al-Sunna* (Būlāq: al-Maṭba‘a al-Amīriyyah, 1904)

dissertation on ‘*The Reconciliation of Reason and Revelation according to Ibn Taymiyya*.’<sup>1</sup> As part of his research, he gathered together as many manuscripts of the *Dar’* that were accessible to him, and, after his return to Cairo, managed to publish a critically edited first volume.<sup>2</sup> This work caught the attention of a number of scholars in the newly formed Imām Muḥammad b. Sa‘ūd University in Riyad, Saudi Arabia, and, impressed with the quality of it, they commissioned him to come to Riyad and complete this, and other works of Ibn Taymiyya.<sup>3</sup> This opportunity (and newly acquired finances) then allowed him to acquire yet further copies of various manuscripts, from Istanbul, Hyderabad, Dublin, Damascus, and other locations.<sup>4</sup> Although none of these manuscripts was complete, in its entirety there was sufficient overlap to critically edit the work, which eventually was printed in ten volumes, the first of which was released in 1979, and the last in 1981.<sup>5</sup> In 1997, an inexpensive and mass-market edition of the work was also released.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For this story, see the editor’s introductory comments to his edition of Ibn Taymiyya’s *al-Ṣafadiyyah*, pp. 1-2. As of this writing, I am still trying to obtain a copy of this dissertation from Cambridge; since it is over fifty years old, it is not available from online sources, and certain copyright restrictions preclude it from being photocopied on request.

<sup>2</sup> *Dar’ ta’ārud al-‘aql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Cairo: Matba‘at Dār al-Kutub, 1971). Note that this is only the first volume.

<sup>3</sup> Muḥammad Rashād Sālim is generally recognized as having been one of the foremost modern specialists in manuscripts of Ibn Taymiyya’s works, and the most scholarly editor of his works in the Arab world. He edited numerous works of Ibn Taymiyya’s, including the *Dar’*, the *Minhāj*, *al-Istiqaṭah*, *al-Ṣafadiyyah*, and the *Jāmi‘ al-Rasā’il*. He had been commissioned to produce an entire library of Ibn Taymiyya’s works (aptly entitled *Maktabah Ibn Taymiyya*), but his untimely death in 1987 brought an end to this project.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed description of these manuscripts, see the editor’s introduction in the first volume of *Dar’*, pp. 23-70.

<sup>5</sup> *Dar’ ta’ārud al-‘aql wa-l-naql*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim (Riyad: Jāmi‘at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd al-Islāmiyyah, 1979-1981). Note that this edition is now the standard edition, and has been copied and printed by numerous publishers. It should be noted that all references in this dissertation to the *Dar’* are to this edition.

<sup>6</sup> *Dar al-ta’ārud* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1997), 5 vol. The quality of the work is to the expected standards of this publishing house.

#### *4.3 The Dar' vis-à-vis Other Works of Ibn Taymiyya*

As mentioned earlier, one of the central goals of Ibn Taymiyya seems to have been to establish the legitimacy and orthodoxy of the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* against all of its intellectual opponents, and in particular the Ash'arīs. Since Ibn Taymiyya chose to concentrate on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's writings, it is no surprise to see that he wrote a number of responses against him. We know of at least two seminal works having been written as a polemical refutation of al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*, and a third one directed against another of al-Rāzī's works, *al-Arba'in fī uṣūl al-dīn* ('The Forty [Principles] Regarding the Foundations of the Religion').<sup>1</sup>

The first of the two works written against the *Ta'sīs* is Ibn Taymiyya's *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya fī ta'sīs bida'ihim al-kalāmiyya* ('Clarifying the Deception of the Jahmīs in Formulating their Innovated *kalām* Doctrines'), which is also known by the shortened *Naqd ta'sīs al-Jahmiyya* ('Refuting the Foundations of the Jahmīs').<sup>2</sup> The use of the word *Ta'sīs* in the title, as a reference to al-Rāzī's work, is of course intended. It is one of the first works mentioned by Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī in his list of Ibn Taymiyya's writings, and he describes it as being a work "...of immense value, incomparable to anything else, and were a person to travel to China to obtain a copy of it, the journey would not be in vain."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This work, which is referenced as *Mas'alah min al-arba'in*, was written as a critique of some of al-Rāzī's forty theological points; unfortunately no manuscripts have yet been found. Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī informs us that it was more than two volumes in length. See: Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> The more proper title is the latter one; Ibn Taymiyya himself references the work with it in his *al-Fatāwa al-Maṣriyya*, vol. 5, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn 'Abd al-Hādī, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

The editors of the work have shown that it was authored by Ibn Taymiyya during his first imprisonment in Egypt, which would mean that it was written sometime between Ramadan of 705/March 1306 to Rabī‘ I of 707/August 1307.<sup>1</sup> That it was written before the *Dar'* is also shown by that fact that Ibn Taymiyya references this work in the *Dar'*.<sup>2</sup> From this, we can state that the *Bayān* was written around a decade before the *Dar'*.

In this work, just as in the *Dar'*, Ibn Taymiyya quotes directly from al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*, and then proceeds to refute it, point by point. Until recently, the book was only available via an uncritical printing that was based on incomplete manuscripts;<sup>3</sup> however, in the last decade, the work has been printed in a far superior and complete edition.<sup>4</sup> In this modern edition, the book itself takes up eight large volumes; the ninth is a summary and analytical study of the book by the various editors, and the final and tenth volume is a comprehensive index of the verses, traditions, names, places and content of the work. A brief summary of the *Bayān* follows.

The *Bayān* is quite clearly written as a refutation of the *Ta'sīs*. Ibn Taymiyya begins by mentioning that, some time after 690/1291, he had written a response to the people of the city of Hama (the treatise known as ‘*Letter to the People of Hama*’, or the

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s introductory volume, *Bayān*, vol. 9, pp. 24-5.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see *Dar'*, v. 4, p. 218, where he refers the reader to the work that he wrote against the *Ta'sīs*.

<sup>3</sup> *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Qāsim (Riyad: Dār al-Qāsim, 1971), 2 vols.

<sup>4</sup> The work was edited in a series of dissertations by eight doctoral candidates, under the general supervision of Dr. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Rājihī, from the Department of *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, Imam Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd University. It was published by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs of Saudi Arabia, in ten volumes, as *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyya fī Ta'sīs Bida'i him al-Kalāmiyya* (Medina: King Fahd Printing Complex, 2005). All future references to the *Bayān* are to this edition unless otherwise noted.

*Hamawiyya*),<sup>1</sup> in which he explained the position of *Ahl al-Sunna* regarding the Divine Attributes. However, questions regarding this issue continued to increase, and Ibn Taymiyya remarks, the need was felt that a comprehensive explanation be given, especially in light of the writings of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, for he “...is the most esteemed (*ajallu*) of those whom they (viz., the Ash‘arīs) rely upon; he is the Imam of all of their later scholars, and the one given ultimate precedence over all others who preceded him.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, comments Ibn Taymiyya, even the Ash‘arīs acknowledge that neither al-Ghazālī nor al-Juwainī came close to the level of al-Rāzī.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it was essential that his arguments, and in particular his work *Ta’sīs*, in which he compiled the evidences for his position, be refuted, for this work is the primary reference (*‘umda*) employed by all those who allegorically interpret the Divine Attributes.<sup>4</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya begins every section by quoting directly from al-Rāzī, and then responding to his assertions. The first two volumes of the work deal with the foundational premises established by al-Rāzī in the introductory section of his *Ta’sīs*, in particular al-Rāzī’s denial of God being a corporeal entity (*jism*), or occupying space (*tahayyuz*). Ibn Taymiyya also begins a detailed discussion of God’s rising over the throne (*istiwā’*), and whether He can be described as having a limit (*hadd*). In the fourth, fifth and first half of the sixth volume, Ibn Taymiyya attempts to refute al-Rāzī’s assertion that God cannot have a direction (*jiha*). He then turns his attention, in quite some detail, to the issue of God’s shape (*ṣūra*), which al-Rāzī interprets as being

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<sup>1</sup> This has been preserved in *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 5, pp. 5-120.

<sup>2</sup> *Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 12.

allegorical. Ibn Taymiyya defends the principle that these words, mentioned in the Scripture, should be used without re-interpretation. In fact, he also says that other words may be used since they too occur in the texts of the ḥadīth, such as ‘person’ (*shakhs*) and ‘being’ (*nafs*). This discussion takes up the remainder of the sixth and the entirety of the seventh volumes. In the eighth volume, Ibn Taymiyya discusses the meeting with God (*liqā'*), which will occur on Judgment Day, and the Beatific Vision (*ru'ya*), and tackles al-Rāzī’s interpretation of these attributes. The latter half of this volume – the final of the *Bayān* – deals with the issue of allegory in the Qur’ān, and the proper interpretation of verse 3:6, in which the Qur’ān references the three concepts of *ta'wīl*, *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* – primary terms upon which al-Rāzī justifies the whole enterprise of interpreting God’s Attributes.

When the *Bayān* appears to be such a thorough work, the question arises as to what prompted Ibn Taymiyya, after writing a multi-volume critique of the *Ta'sīs*, to return to the work a decade later and write the *Dar' al-ta'ārud*? The answer to this question lies in a simple comparison between the contents of the two works. Unlike the *Bayān*, the *Dar'* only intends to challenge one specific assertion of al-Rāzī’s work. In the first paragraph of the introduction, Ibn Taymiyya quotes al-Rāzī’s ‘Universal Principle’, or the *Qānūn al-Kullī*, and then states that this is the general principle that al-Rāzī used to interpret the Qur’ān and Sunna and, through it, rejected much of what the prophets preached. He states that this rule was not an invention of al-Rāzī, but rather many people before him also proposed similar rules, including al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, and

al-Ghazālī.<sup>1</sup> He then proceeds to systematically attack this rule in the next ten volumes, expounding upon what he deems to be the contradictions and fallacies in it, in forty-four specific arguments (*wajh*).<sup>2</sup>

The *Bayān*, on the other hand, following the same vein as some of Ibn Taymiyya's earlier works, such as the *Epistle to Ḥama* ('al-Ḥamawiyya) and the *Epistle to Wāṣiṭ* (al-Wāṣitiyya), concentrates on explaining specific Divine Attributes and refuting attempts to interpret them allegorically. Therefore, it is clear that the *Dar'* is a more specific and systematic critique of one point of al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs*, which can be called the foundational premise of the work, whereas the *Bayān* is a broader refutation, concentrating on a number of key attributes.

It is interesting to note that Ibn Taymiyya has only written a point-by-point refutation on a handful of works, al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs* being one of them. The other two that are known are his *Minhāj al-sunna*, a refutation of *Minhāj al-karāma* of the Shī'ī theologian Ibn Muṭahhir al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325), and his *Sharḥ 'aqīda al-Īsfahāniyya* ('The Explanation of the Īsfahānī Creed'), which is a refutation on the Ash'arī creed of al-Īsfahānī (d. 688/1289). However, there is a marked difference between the former and the latter two works. Whereas in both the *Minhāj* and the *Sharḥ al-Īsfahāniyya*, Ibn Taymiyya was specifically asked to comment on the works in question,<sup>3</sup> his works against al-Rāzī do not appear to have been prompted by any questioner. Thus, this

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<sup>1</sup> *Dar'*, v. 1, pp. 4-6.

<sup>2</sup> Although not directly relevant to this dissertation, Ibn Taymiyya's most prominent student, Ibn al-Qayyim, summarized the *Dar'* and expanded upon it in his work *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*. I have written about this work, and commented on Ibn al-Qayyim's debt to his teacher in my article "The Unleashed Thunderbolts" of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: An Introductory Essay," *Oriente Moderno* XC (2010), pp. 129-43.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Minhāj al-Sunna*, v. 1, p. 7; *Sharḥ al-Īsfahāniyya*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sa'wī (unpublished masters dissertation presented to Imām Muḥammad b. Sa'ūd University, Dept. of Theology, 1987), p. 1 of the edited text.

work of al-Rāzī could possibly be the sole extant work that Ibn Taymiyya actually intended and singled out to write a refutation against, and this led to writing two separate works, the *Bayān* and the *Dar'*.

Elsewhere, he explains his motives for this by saying, “And I have mentioned [the refutation] of this principle in great detail in *al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyya* [referring to the *Bayān*], which includes elucidating the foundational premises of these groups. [These premises] were compiled by Abū ‘Abdallāh [Fakhr al-Dīn] al-Rāzī in a work that he entitled *Ta’sīs al-Taqdīs*, for he compiled most of their evidences, *and I have not seen any work of theirs* [i.e., the *mutakallimūn*] *that is similar to it.*”<sup>1</sup> Quite simply, Ibn Taymiyya chose this work as a basis for refuting the *mutakallimūn* since he considered it to be the most comprehensive book that detailed Ash‘arī arguments.

This also illustrates why Ibn Taymiyya singled out al-Rāzī and his works, and almost seems to bypass other Ash‘arī theologians (including al-Ghazālī<sup>2</sup>). And the crux of the argument, the *al-Qānūn al-Kullī* or ‘Universal Principle,’ was seen by Ibn Taymiyya as being the primary theological backbone of Ash‘arī thought. Ibn Taymiyya felt that by attacking this very fundamental premise, he would be able to systematically destroy the very pillar upon which the entire science of *kalām*, and in fact even *falsafa*, was built. For Ibn Taymiyya, this *Qānūn* was an overarching principle from which all of the groups that opposed his version of Sunnī Islam drew their theological, ethical and even socio-political views. The *Qānūn* allowed these groups to re-interpret God’s Attributes,

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, op. cit., vol. 6, p. 289 – emphasis mine.

<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that al-Ghazālī is not mentioned or critiqued by Ibn Taymiyya, for he most certainly is. But al-Ghazālī is only mentioned a fraction of the time in comparison to al-Rāzī, and Ibn Taymiyya never singled out any specific work of al-Ghazālī for a critique, whereas more than one work of al-Rāzī was singled out.

deny or distort God's predestination, belittle the role of the prophets, and even claim that parts of the Qur'ān were metaphorical and need not be believed in. And by destroying the *Qānūn*, he felt that he could reclaim the place that the *Ahl al-Hadīth* and *Ahl al-Sunna* occupied in his eyes: that of orthodox Sunnī Islam, faithful to the blessed *salaf* of the past.

## CHAPTER TWO

Analyzing the *Dar*<sup>o</sup>

This chapter will take a close look at Ibn Taymiyya's *Dar' al-Ta'ārud*. It is not possible to discuss the book's specific issues and themes without having a working knowledge of its contents, and it is with this goal that this chapter is written.

This chapter consists of three sections. In the first section, the forty-four arguments outlined in the *Dar'* will be summarized, along with references to the primary tangents that Ibn Taymiyya's writings inevitably contain. These are detailed in accordance with his original arrangement. Following this summary, these forty-four arguments will be reexamined, and an attempt will be made at organizing these points around broader motifs, in order to circumvent Ibn Taymiyya's somewhat disjointed writing style. Section two will detail observations on Ibn Taymiyya's conception and usage of the terms '*aql* (intellect) and '*naql* (Scripture). And section three will conclude this chapter with an attempt at constructing a 'Taymiyyan' equivalent of al-Rāzī's *Qānūn*.

This chapter lays the groundwork for the third and final chapter, in which one of the primary issues tackled by Ibn Taymiyya in the *Dar'* will be examined, i.e., the issue of the *kalām* proofs for God's Existence, and Ibn Taymiyya's critique of and alternative to these proofs, with a particular emphasis on the role of the human *fitra*.

## 1. An Overview of the *Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ*

### 1.1 A Sequential Summary of the *Dar'*

Ibn Taymiyya's *Dar'* commences, after the customary extolling of God and sending of salutations upon Muḥammad, with a quotation from al-Rāzī's *Qānūn*, verbatim,<sup>1</sup> whilst specifying that others prior to al-Rāzī, such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-‘Arabī, had preceded him in establishing similar principles.<sup>2</sup> In fact, every single sect, according to Ibn Taymiyya, has a rule that it takes as a basis for its beliefs and through which it validates its interpretations of the religious texts. Ibn Taymiyya holds that this exercise resembles pre-Islamic Christian practices, since the Christians took the decrees of their Councils as the central doctrines of their faith, and proceeded to interpret the scriptural texts of the Old and New Testaments in their light so as reconcile them with these creeds. These decrees were derived from what later Christians assumed to be correct, and in this they erred in judgment and intellect. This, claims Ibn Taymiyya, is similar to the methodology of the Jahmīs<sup>3</sup> and philosophers.<sup>4</sup>

These groups, proceeds Ibn Taymiyya, adopted two primary methods of dealing with prophetic texts: the *ṭarīqa al-tabdīl* ('replacement approach') and the *ṭarīqa al-tajhīl*

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<sup>1</sup> The simplified version of the *Qānūn* is, "If rational evidences conflict with Scriptural ones, precedence must be given to rational evidences over Scripture."

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter One, Section 3.3, for a history of the development of the *Qānūn*.

<sup>3</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya (and his student Ibn al-Qayyim), the term 'Jahmī' loosely refers to all groups employing metaphorical interpretation of God's Attributes, in particular, the Mu'tazilīs, the Maturīdites, and the Ash'arīs. See: Yasir Qadhi, "The Unleashed Thunderbolts" of Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah: An Introductory Essay," *Oriente Moderno*, XC (2010), p. 136.

<sup>4</sup> *Dar' al-Ta'āruḍ* (henceforth: *DT*), vol. 1, pp. 4-7. Ibn Taymiyya elaborates on this point in more detail in his *al-Jawāb* (see esp. vol. 4, pp. 84-120). Thomas Michel has also summarized some of Ibn Taymiyya's views in his work, *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ* (New York: Caravan Books, 1985).

(‘ignorance approach’). Those employing the ‘*tarīqa al-tabdīl*’ may be further subdivided into: those who considered the prophets to be preaching fanciful and imaginative beliefs, and those who considered them to be teaching via metaphorical language and symbolisms.

To clarify his point, Ibn Taymiyya mentions that Ibn Sīnā (for example, in his *al-Risāla al-Adhāwiyya*),<sup>1</sup> al-Farābī, al-Suhrawardī, and Ibn Rushd were among those who held that the prophets preached in imaginative and fanciful speech, whilst knowing the content and meaning of their teachings was not in actuality true. They did so, Ibn Sīnā argues, because it was better for the masses to be taught in such a manner, and more conducive for their well-being; or, as al-Farābī argues, because the prophets themselves were not as intimately aware of the truth as the philosophers were.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the majority of the proponents of *kalām*, such as the Kullābīs and Mu'tazilīs, subscribed to the belief that the prophets did not intentionally deceive the masses. Rather, they utilized symbolic language so as to be comprehended by them and thus, according to those who held this view, what is required is to understand the true intent of the prophets by resorting to *ta'wīl* (re-interpretation). And the proper understanding of this term (i.e., *ta'wīl*), Ibn Taymiyya writes, has already been explained in other places.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's comments on this epistle's of Ibn Sīnā has been translated and commented on by Y. Michot, “A Mamluk Theologian’s Commentary on Avicenna’s *Risāla Adhāwiyya*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 14:2 (2003), pp. 149-203.

<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, Ibn Taymiyya's personal interpretation of Ibn Sīnā and al-Farābī. The mainstream interpretation of the *falāṣifa* would be that they claim prophets know the truth, just like philosophers, but choose to express it in symbolic and figurative language.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Ibn Taymiyya's lengthy discussion of the types of *ta'wīl* in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 3, pp. 41-69. He shall also elaborate on the true meaning of *ta'wīl* and its misusage by the Ash'arīs later on in the *Dar'*, as in *DT*, vol. 5, p. 234.

As for the second group (*viz.*, those who favored the ‘Ignorance Approach’), the consequence of their stance is an accusation that the prophets and their followers are completely ignorant of the intent behind the verses that describe God and His Attributes.<sup>1</sup>

All of these groups subscribing to either of the above opinions, claims Ibn Taymiyya, united in their belief in the Prophet’s ignorance with regards to the meaning of the texts, or that he did not teach the meanings of these texts to his followers. Some argued that the Prophet intentionally deceived his followers in view of their benefit, and those holding this belief are well known as heretics (*zanādiqa*). Others did not explicitly assert so, but it is inevitable that they presupposed either of the above two possibilities.

Therefore, writes Ibn Taymiyya, since it is not possible to explain the true intent of the words of the Prophet without first demonstrating that there can be no rational reason to oppose them, an attempt will be made in this book (*viz.*, the *Dar*) to prove the falsity of al-Rāzī’s *Qānūn*. Ibn Taymiyya states that he had written another work almost thirty years previously in which he refuted al-Rāzī’s claim that textual evidences in and of themselves can never yield certainty.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this work, he points out, is to prove that there is no rational basis to reject or reinterpret these Divine Texts, and also to falsify the claim that rational evidences should be preferred over textual ones.

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 11-16. The point that Ibn Taymiyya wishes to underscore here is that his opponents, explicitly or implicitly, deny the Prophet his true role, which is to expound and clarify the Will of God, including aspects of theology, to the believers. From Ibn Taymiyya’s perspective, it is only by taking the words of the Prophet at face value that his role as a Messenger of God is truly substantiated.

<sup>2</sup> The reference is to his work *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, which has already been mentioned in Chapter One, Section 4.3.

One of the fundamental pitfalls that these groups fell into was their presumption that the Qur'ānic proofs were merely texts that had to be believed in blindly, devoid of any rational or intellectual merit. Ibn Taymiyya proceeds to point out that nothing could be further from the truth, since God Himself utilizes rational proofs within the Qur'ān that are not only superior to those used by the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers, but also yield certain knowledge, in contrast to many of the proofs used by the latter.<sup>1</sup>

Yet another problem was the fact that many groups considered issues that were not from the fundamentals of religion as being from the fundamentals,<sup>2</sup> such as proving the existence of God via the temporality of accidents and the createdness of bodies (*dalīl al-'arād wa-hudūth al-ajsām*), while these are not propositions that God legislated for His servants.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya clarifies that he is not claiming an impermissibility of employing terminologies that are not found in the Qur'ān or Sunna, nor is he declaring it impermissible to speak to others according to their understandings and languages. Rather, he argues, it is the actual *implications* and *meanings* of these concepts that are incorrect, and not the mere usage of these terminologies.<sup>4</sup>

Another question that must be resolved in any discussion of theology, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is: Is it required for each and every person to arrive at certainty (*yaqīn*) in all aspects of creed? While it is true that this is the fundamental basis of most

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 21-35.

<sup>2</sup> I was not able to find in the *Dar'* any passage in which Ibn Taymiyya himself demarcates what is 'fundamental' to the religion and what is not. However, a safe guess may be that Ibn Taymiyya views the primary pillars of theology, such as belief in God, His Attributes, the reality of faith (*imān*), and predestination, to be of the 'fundamentals'.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp.36-41. Ibn Taymiyya's proofs for the existence of God, and his disapproval of the cosmological proof, is elaborated on in Chapter Three, Section 1.2.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 41-45, followed by evidences supporting this point: vol. 1, pp. 45-51.

groups of *kalām*, for Ibn Taymiyya, such a broad, unqualified statement simply has no evidence in the Book of God, or the Sunna of His Messenger. Moreover, one can also say that these groups of *kalām* are the furthest from fulfilling this very fundamental themselves, for at times one of them will use a principle, believing it to be indubitable in nature, and yet, when it comes to applying it in another issue, he will consider it to be false.

God requires the believer to have certainty in what He has said; otherwise, most of these finer details of theology are confusing to the masses, and God does not require each and every person to sift through and formulate opinions regarding them. Indeed, “*God does not place a burden on any soul beyond that it can bear*” (Q. 2:286); hence, if a person sincerely strove to arrive at the truth, and exerted himself to the best of his capabilities, he shall be forgiven even if he was mistaken in his conclusion. On the other hand, if a person intentionally neglected the Book of God, or preferred his own opinions over Scriptural evidences, in this case he is susceptible to the threat of punishment for having failed to live up to what was required of him.<sup>1</sup>

The texts of the Qur’ān and ḥadīth declare themselves, alone, to be sufficient for mankind’s guidance. Therefore, once one obtains a full understanding of the meanings of the Book and the Sunna, and then compares and contrasts these meanings with the concepts and terminologies used by the *mutakallimūn*, it is possible to see how divergent the two paradigms are. It is precisely for this reason that many of the terms used by the scholars of *kalām* were neither affirmed nor negated by the pious predecessors (*salaf*), for these terms contain both truth and falsehood. To

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 52-59.

unconditionally affirm or negate these terms would necessarily also affirm the falsehood in them, or negate the truth in them.<sup>1</sup>

The point in all of this discussion, Ibn Taymiyya states, was to discuss al-Rāzī's *Qānūn*. This *Qānūn* can be responded to via a general, summarized response, and a detailed response.

The general response is to point out that this maxim is built on three premises: firstly, that the two evidences posited will necessarily conflict; secondly, the restriction of the possibilities to the aforementioned four scenarios;<sup>2</sup> and lastly, the impossibility of three of them, hence leaving only the fourth as a possible reality.

However, Ibn Taymiyya claims that an alternative premise can also be offered, which is to say: if two evidences conflict with one another, regardless of whether these evidences are textual or rational, their strength must be examined. Logically, then, there will be three possibilities: (i) both evidences are indubitable, or (ii) both are dubitable, or (iii) one is dubitable and the other indubitable.

Two indubitable evidences can, in actual fact, never contradict one another, regardless of whether they are textual or rational, because by definition an indubitable evidence cannot entertain the possibility of doubt. To suggest otherwise is to claim a logical impossibility. On the other hand, if one of the evidences is indubitable and the other is dubitable, precedence must be given to the indubitable evidence, regardless of whether it is taken from Scripture or based on rational proofs; this is because an ambiguous evidence can never be given precedence over an unambiguous one. The last

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 72-78.

<sup>2</sup> He is referring to the four possibilities that al-Rāzī's 'Universal Principal' mentions; this has already been discussed in Chapter One, Section 3.2.

possibility – of both evidences being dubitable – necessitates that one look at external factors to see which of these should be given precedence, and when this is identified [once again, regardless of whether that evidence is Scriptural or rational], precedence is given to it.

However, as far as the *mutakallimūn* are concerned, the Scriptural evidence is not primarily an indubitable evidence, only the rational evidence is considered such. Whereas, Ibn Taymiyya argues, if a rational evidence is to be preferred over a Scriptural one, this should be *because it is indubitable*, and not merely due to its being rational, nor because it is the basis of affirming Scriptural evidence<sup>1</sup> – contrary to the claims of the *mutakallimūn*.

Based on this, it is clear that once a Scriptural text has yielded indubitable knowledge, it is simply impossible for a rational evidence to oppose or contradict it. For Ibn Taymiyya, the *Qānūn* demonstrates a major flaw: that a false premise is posited, after which one is forced to accept its incorrect corollaries.<sup>2</sup> Throughout all of this, they [the *mutakallimūn*] completely sideline the fact that the premise itself is flawed.<sup>3</sup>

Following his lengthy introduction, Ibn Taymiyya delves into a structured response, which he proceeds to detail in forty-four points:

**First:** The binary distinction of evidences into *rational* and *Scriptural*, and the preference of *rational* in all circumstances, is simply incorrect. Rather, preference

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<sup>1</sup> By this he means: the *mutakallimūn* give more weight to rational evidences *qua* rational evidences merely because these evidence are a necessary precondition to proving the veracity of Scripture. Hence, the genus of rational evidences is stronger in weight than the genus of Scriptural evidences; for Ibn Taymiyya, this is completely false. Both evidences needs to be weighed, regardless of their source, based on their level of indubitalibity.

<sup>2</sup> In this case: the fact that Scripture will not always provide indubitable evidence.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 72-81; here follows some examples from various groups.

should always given to an indubitable evidence, regardless of whether it is rational or Scriptural. And if a rational evidence is indubitable, it shall be given precedence over a Scriptural evidence, *not because of its rationality, but because it is indubitable.*<sup>1</sup>

**Second:** Limiting the possible scenarios to four is not correct, for there is another alternative (which has preceded), namely: that on occasion the *rational* evidence shall be given preference, and on occasion, the *textual* evidence, depending on which is indubitable and definitive. Meaning, limiting the possibilities to either the textual or the rational being preferred, or else the two impossibilities will result, is simply false.<sup>2</sup>

**Third:** The claim that reason is the basis and foundation for affirming Scripture, and thus if it is rejected, it shall *ipso facto* entail a rejection of Scripture, is not correct. Ibn Taymiyya claims that what Scripture posits is independent of reason, in that the knowledge Scripture comes with must be true by necessity, for even if creation did not exist, God and His speech would still be true. What these opponents mean by their claim, of course, is that the truth of Scripture is, *for us*, dependant on the confirmation of our rational thought process – not that the truth of Scripture per se is dependant on rational evidences: a man's intellect will not give or deprive God's law and His revelation of any characteristic it does not independently posses.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, once this has been clarified, the question arises: what exactly is meant by 'intellect' ('*aql*)? If by *intellect* is meant the 'internal instinct' (*gharīza*) that all people have, then this supposition is simply false, for this internal instinct is not an

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 86-87.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1 , p. 87. By the 'two impossibilities', he is referring to the final two scenarios of al-Rāzī's *Qānūn*, namely, that either both contradictory evidences are affirmed, or both are rejected.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 87-89.

independent knowledge that is capable of contradicting Scripture. If, however, by *intellect* is meant knowledge that one's internal instinct (*gharīza*) derives and acquires (i.e., *derived knowledge*), one can respond by stating that such derived knowledge is varied and numerous, and it is not claimed that each and every derived knowledge is a necessary presupposition to affirm the truth of Scripture. In other words, Ibn Taymiyya asks, is the claim being made that every science and understanding derived by man and based on the intellect is the basis of affirming the truth of the Scripture? Of course, he responds, no one claims this. Rather, what these groups claim is that only those parts of knowledge that are needed to affirm the truth of the messengers is what is required. Therefore, to find fault with other types of derived knowledge – knowledge that is not related to affirming the truthfulness of the prophets – is not, in fact, detrimental to affirming Scripture.

The error that al-Rāzī and others fell into was to deem ‘rationality’ (*'aql*) as one whole and complete entity that must either be true or false in its entirety. Rather, mankind has agreed that what comes under the label of ‘*rational knowledge*’ could possibly be true and could possibly be false.

Now, if they were to say that what is intended is only those elements of rational thought upon which acceptance of Scripture is based, this too, Ibn Taymiyya says, can be challenged via a number of ways.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, it is universally acknowledged that recognizing the Prophet as a true Prophet is not dependant upon what these groups

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<sup>1</sup> Six points are mentioned in total; only two are summarized here. See: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 91-100.

identify as ‘rational proofs.’<sup>1</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya, the rational premises required to establish the truth of revelation are few, simple, and beyond doubt; and, he points out, this is a matter that even Ash‘arī theologians acknowledge to be true. Secondly, these ‘rational proofs’ that are offered as being a necessary condition upon which acceptance of Scripture is based are, in fact, proofs that the prophets of God themselves did not employ, so how can it be asserted that these are necessary pre-conditions?

Ibn Taymiyya says that while he affirms that the prophets of God did not use the proof of the ‘Createdness of Accidents and Bodies’ to prove God’s existence, his opponents claim otherwise, citing one of two evidences.<sup>2</sup> The first is to claim this proof may be inferred from the Qur’ānic story of Abraham’s search for God and his subsequent dialogue with his people.<sup>3</sup> This is clearly an incorrect understanding of Abraham’s argument.<sup>4</sup> The second response is their claim that even if a specific proof is not found in the Qur’ān, it is nonetheless something that is derived from correct reasoning and sound use of logic; and as the proof is indeed true, what it necessitates or negates must also be true. This can easily be answered by pointing out that the vast majority of the masses who believed in the prophets did so without even knowing this proof (*viz.*, the *kalām* proof for God’s existence); moreover, even the proponents of the *Qānūn* acknowledged that this proof was not taught by the prophets. If this is indeed

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<sup>1</sup> The reference here is to the ‘Proof of the Existence of God from the Theory of Bodies and Accidents’. This shall be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> The next thirty-seven pages (*DT*, vol. 1, pp. 100-37) are dedicated to responding to both of these questions. Ibn Taymiyya’s responses are not summarized here.

<sup>3</sup> The reference here is to the Qur’ānic passage Q. 6:74-83.

<sup>4</sup> This point shall be discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.1, hence it is not summarized here.

the case, Ibn Taymiyya continues, how then can something extraneous to the religion be taken and used to re-interpret or deny that which is from the religion?<sup>1</sup>

**Fourth:** Either the intellect knows with certainty the truthfulness of the Prophet, or it does not.

If it does *not* know the truthfulness of the Prophet, then it is not possible for any contradiction to exist, since a contradiction can only exist between two realities, and in this case, what the Prophet has said is not a certainty for this person, but rather an uncertainty. However, if the intellect knows that the Prophet is speaking the truth, then how can it simultaneously accept him as a prophet and reject what is coming from him? It is as if a person is commanded, “Do not believe what you know must be true, because it shall conflict with your knowledge of the truthfulness of the person who told you.” Or, to make it even simpler, he is told, “Reject him so that you do not end up rejecting him!” For Ibn Taymiyya, such a person falls prey to doing exactly what he says he should not be doing: rejecting the Prophet. And this is precisely the state of those who reject a specific statement from the Prophet, whilst knowing that he uttered such a statement, because if he were to accept it, then according to him it would mean a rejection of what the Prophet says.<sup>2</sup>

The net result of such skepticism, for Ibn Taymiyya, is an ultimate rejection of all the statements in the Scripture relating to the Divine Attributes. What the Prophet comes with in this regards becomes superfluous – hence his existence and non-

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<sup>1</sup> The second answer is further responded to in four manners; see *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 130-133.

<sup>2</sup> Here Ibn Taymiyya attempts to prove the circularity of their argument. By attempting to ‘protect’ the Prophet from charges of bringing false doctrines, they end up rejecting the statements of that Prophet, which was there initial concern in the first place.

existence are the same! It is for this reason – Ibn Taymiyya proceeds emphatically – that this evil *Qānūn* must be refuted, for it is the stepping-stone to heresy (*ilhād*).<sup>1</sup>

**Fifth:** If it is known that revelation (*wahy*) is true, and that the Prophet must speak the truth, then one must look at whether the Prophet mentioned anything regarding a particular issue or not. There are three possibilities: (i) that he definitively taught regarding the specific issue at hand, or (ii) that he taught in a manner that was not clear and thus was open to interpretation, or (iii) that he did neither of these two.

Now, if it is known that he taught in a definitive manner [(i)], then nothing can logically contradict his instruction, whether it be from the Scriptures or from the intellect.<sup>2</sup> And if he taught in a manner that is open to interpretation [(ii)], it is possible that a rationally derived premise could negate the issue at hand, and if such a premise exists, precedence is given to it, not because it is rationally derived but because certain knowledge is preferred over knowledge that is doubtful. And if the rationally derived premise itself is doubtful, the verdict [on the issue at hand] shall be adjourned until other evidence comes to light. And if the Prophet did not speak about the specific issue [(iii)], then in this case there cannot be any contradiction in the first place.

Therefore, the unconditional statement that intellect should be preferred over Scripture is misguided and incorrect.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1 , pp. 135-7. The term *ilhād* is currently translated as ‘atheism’, as this is what modern Arabic calls this phenomenon. Of course, atheism as it currently exists was almost unknown, and certainly not a common phenomenon, at the time of Ibn Taymiyya; hence what is being referred to is most likely the rejection of God’s commandments and the necessity of following the *Shari‘a*.

<sup>2</sup> Since the fact that he is speaking the truth is already a given.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 137.

*Sixth:* The opposite can be said, which is that if there is a conflict between intellect and revelation, precedence should be given to revelation, since the intellect has confirmed the verity of revelation in all that it says, whereas revelation has not confirmed the verity of the intellect in all that it concludes. It is clear that this maxim, were it to be said, actually holds true – at least more so than the *Qānūn*.

Ibn Taymiyya quotes an unnamed scholar as having said, “The role of the intellect is to assign a guardian: it has assigned the Prophet as a guardian, and then absolved itself from any role.”

An illustration will clarify this point. Imagine, offers Ibn Taymiyya, an unlearned person leading a questioner to a scholar, and explaining that this scholar was a person qualified at delivering religious verdicts. Now, if the unlearned person were to then differ with the scholar’s verdict, and tell the questioner, “You must follow me, rather than the scholar, since I led you to the scholar in the first place,” one could respond by stating, “When you testified that he is the scholar and guided me to him, you in actual fact testified that *he* is worthy of being followed rather than you. And the fact that I agreed with you in this judgment of who the scholar is does not in any way prerequisite my agreeing with you in all other areas of knowledge. As well, your disagreeing with the scholar does not impugn your initial assessment of his scholarliness, for your disagreement with his verdict is not related to your judging his scholarly credentials.”

Therefore, once a person’s intellect arrives at the conclusion that the Prophet is indeed a messenger of God, and he then finds his intellect not agreeing with one particular issue that the Prophet said, Ibn Taymiyya claims that this same intellect should require his submission to the one who has most authority, realizing that it [his

own intellect] is not as perfect as the intellect of the one whose authority and truth he has affirmed (*i.e.*, the Prophet).<sup>1</sup>

**Seventh:** It can be said that giving precedence to reason over Revelation is impossible and contradictory, whereas giving precedence to Revelation over reason is possible and consistent. This is because rational judgments are relative: what might be known to a particular person may be unknown to another, and what might be known to a person at one time may not be known at another time. Therefore, to claim that precedence must be given to reason over Revelation in case of dispute is to ask the people to follow that which they have no means of clarifying or demarcating in the first place!

Revelation, on the other hand, is something that does not change from person to person, or from situation to situation. Additionally, it is possible to understand it, and that is why God has, in numerous verses, commanded mankind to refer to it when a matter is disagreed over (as in Q. 4:59 and Q. 2:213).

For Ibn Taymiyya, it is an undisputed fact that what is known from clear rational thought can never contradict explicit Revelation. He states that this is a matter that he has contemplated, in all the issues that people have differed over, including the nature of the Divine Attributes, pre-destination, prophecy etc., and in his experience, he has found that what the intellect confirms can never be opposed by explicit revelation.

And it is known that the Prophet never preaches doctrines that are rationally impossible, but rather he mentions doctrines that astound the intellect, and which the intellect is not capable of arriving at by itself.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 138-44.

**Eighth:** If one considers the subjects regarding which it is claimed that intellect conflicts with Scripture, it is clear that these are not even subjects that are derived purely from the intellect, such as mathematics, calculations, science and the broad issues of theology. Rather, there is nothing from the Qur'ān or the Sunna on these subjects that would conflict with reason, unless it be a fabricated tradition or a misunderstanding derived from an authentic tradition.

In fact, what is known from the obvious and explicit intellect is even clearer than what can only be known from Scripture or unanimous consensus. So if one cannot find in the authentic traditions of the Prophet anything that conflicts with some of the more ambiguous evidences, such as unanimous consensus of the scholars (*ijmā'*), how then, asks Ibn Taymiyya, does one think that there will be traditions that conflict with clear and obvious rationality?<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the majority of those claiming to be follow intellect are in actual fact blindly following (*taqlīd*) their scholars, even if, at times, they themselves with their own intellects disagree with what they say, they simply assume that the scholar has more knowledge than they do.

This, despite the fact that it is patently clear that the science of logic itself is riddled with errors, and Ibn Taymiyya points out that he has clarified this in many other places. He states that the writings of their scholars, who include the likes of Alexander of Aphrodisias (~ d. 200 CE), Proclus (d. 485 CE), Themistius (d. 390 CE), al-

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 144-47.

<sup>2</sup> Here Ibn Taymiyya employs one of his many *faith-based* arguments. How is it possible, he asks, that there are no contradictions between God's Revelation and the absolute sciences (such as mathematics) and yet these opponents claim that there are contradictions between God's Revelation and the more obscure sciences? This, despite the fact that even the absolute sciences, or at least man's attempt to study them, are full of internal contradictions.

Farābī, Ibn Sīna, al-Suhrawardī ‘the Martyr’ (d. 587/1191) and Ibn Rushd ‘the grandson’ (d. 594/1198), and others like them, are in fact so full of mistakes and shortcomings that the majority of the people of intelligence from the children of Adam can see these mistakes for themselves, not to mention the inherent contradictions present in their writings. Therefore, how can it be said, after one recognizes the shortcomings in the works of these scholars, that there exists in the Book of God and the Sunna of His Prophet matters that the average man, with his intellect alone, can conclude are false?

To summarize, says Ibn Taymiyya: every text that has been correctly attributed and verified as originating from the Prophet can never be found as having contradicted explicit reason. Rather, what is possible is that it contradicts whims and fancies that themselves are built on shaky foundations – arguments of the Sophists, not indubitable evidences.<sup>1</sup>

**Ninth:** The claim that a person should give precedence to his own intellect over the Prophetic texts is a claim that can never be defined, for the philosophers and *mutakallimūn* have disagreed over what they call ‘rationality’. Each one amongst them claims that a certain matter is known by intellectual necessity, while another negates that very matter using the same premise!

So, for example, the Mu‘tazilīs deny God’s Attributes and negate pre-destination, claiming to base this negation on logical and rational premises, yet their opponents<sup>2</sup> affirm the Divine Attributes and pre-destination, also citing rational evidences. And

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 148-56.

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the Ash‘arīs.

yet, Ibn Taymiyya wryly remarks, both groups have such intelligence and aptitude that clearly sets them apart from most of mankind!

Another matter is also noticed, which is that the farther a group is from the Sunna, the more marked are the differences between members of that same group. So, for example, the Mu'tazilīs differ more amongst themselves than the affirmers of the Attributes from the *mutakallimūn* (i.e., the Ash'arīs), and the Shī'īs differ even more than the Mu'tazilīs – so much so that it is said that they themselves reach seventy-three groups! And as for the philosophers, Ibn Taymiyya says, there is in fact no one principle that unites all of their strands.<sup>1</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya refers his readers to what has been narrated from the *falāsifa* regarding the physical sciences, especially mathematical sciences (for this is considered to be the most correct of all intellectual sciences according to them). Even in these fields, one finds that their scholars have greatly differed, and the very book that they have most united upon (here what is meant is the Almagest of Ptolemy) contains many issues for which there is no clear evidence, or that people have disagreed over, or that are built upon premises that contain specious arguments and perhaps even outright errors. So, if this is the case with regards to such sciences, argues Ibn Taymiyya, what then is one to make of their knowledge of the Divine?

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<sup>1</sup> While this is no doubt a rather simplistic conclusion, a basic look at the standard works of heresiology compiled by Sunnī authorities might in fact give credence to such an impression. See for example al-Baghdādī's *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, pp. 112-172 for a list of Mu'tazilī groups, and pp. 39-71 and pp. 211-239 for Shī'ī groups. In contrast, Sunnī groups, from his own perspective, are one united group. Interestingly, he mentions Ḥanbalīs and Ash'arīs as if they were united; see the theologians that he lists in pp. 318-20.

Now, if one examines the writings of their most respected scholars, one discovers their own testimony regarding the level of certainty that their intellect was able to give them. Here is al-Rāzī versifying:<sup>1</sup>

*The end result of the intellect's march is regression  
And most of the efforts of the world is misguidance*

*Our souls find no comfort in our bodies  
And all that we have gained in our world is pain and misery*

*And we have not benefited from our research, throughout our entire lives  
Save that we have gathered together 'He said,' and 'It was said'.*

Narrations of a similar nature can be found from many others as well. Even someone as learned as al-Ghazālī – despite his intelligence, his religiosity and his knowledge of *kalām*, *falsafa* and mysticism – only manages to reach an uncertain conclusion for many of these matters, claims our author.

Ibn Taymiyya re-states that true guidance is only in what God has sent the prophets with; therefore, whoever turns away from it shall never be guided. So what then of the one who actually *opposes* it by what he believes contradicts it, and prefers this opposition over it?

The point here is that even if one were to allow researchers to turn away from the Book of God and to challenge it on the basis of the reason alone, still, there would be no precise definition of what exactly one must do, and therefore no true no guidance is achieved. The only thing that can be said is that every person possessing any intellect should rely upon his own reason, and whatever opposes the sayings of the Prophet

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<sup>1</sup> These lines from al-Rāzī are a favorite of Ibn Taymiyya, and he quotes them in many other works as well (see, for example, his *al-Fatāwā al-Ḥamawiyya al-Kubra*, ed. Hamad b. Abd al-Muhsin al-Tuwayjirī (Riyad: Dār al-Sumay'ī, 1998), p. 208). For these lines, see: Ibn Abī Usaybi'a, Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Āṭibbā'*, ed. August Müller (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-Wahbiyya, 1882), p. 28.

from this should be preferred over them. And it is obvious, states Ibn Taymiyya, that this solution would create even more chaos and misguidance.<sup>1</sup>

**Tenth:** Ibn Taymiyya writes that this *Qānūn* may be responded to by its exact opposite, which is to say: If reason were to contradict revelation, it would be required to give precedence to revelation, for reason has already proven the veracity of revelation. Thus, by privileging reason over revelation, one is in fact denying what reason itself has shown, whereas by privileging revelation over reason, one rescues both reason and revelation.<sup>2</sup>

If one were to respond by stating that this revised *Qānūn* in fact shows that reason cannot be used as evidence (since it was shown to be false), it can be said, firstly, that this revised *Qānūn* is only being presented as a *response* to the original for the sake of argument, otherwise in reality true reason can never conflict with explicit Scripture; and, secondly, the rational proofs that are used to derive the veracity of the messengers are separate to and independent from the rational proofs that are claimed to conflict with Scripture. Thus, it is as if two rational proofs are conflicting: the first is the proof that the Prophet is a true prophet, and the second is a proof that is being used to reject a specific statement from the Prophet. In this case, the first intellectual proof (*viz.*, the knowledge that the Prophet is true) is privileged over the second intellectual proof (*viz.*, a specific theological point that seems questionable).

The point here is that whoever claims that revelation must be true – and it is with such people in mind that this work is written – cannot subsequently claim that reason

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 156-170.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 170-2.

negates it, for it is his own reason that has led him to first conclusion. However, if he were to say: “I shall affirm everything from Revelation except that which conflicts with reason,” he can be responded to in several ways:<sup>1</sup>

Firstly, intellectual proofs have shown that everything a prophet says must be unconditionally true, hence it is not permissible to place a condition on his truthfulness such that his statements will only be accepted when no rational evidence opposes it.

Secondly, there is no end to what people can derive from their minds, some of it true and some false. Therefore, if one were to claim that a statement from the Scripture can be rejected based upon a rationally derived matter, this would imply that no text can ever be affirmed because it is always possible that someone might derive a rational proof that appears to oppose it.

Thirdly, any evidence that has within it a condition that allows us to reject it if opposing evidence is found is clearly not an indubitable evidence, else such a condition would not be necessary. Therefore, this would result in claiming that the intellect can never fully allow Scripture to give certain evidence, and that it is only the intellect that is indubitable, and all of Scripture is presumptive in nature.

The upshot in all of this, writes Ibn Taymiyya, is that it is not possible for any believer to have a *conditional* belief in the Prophet; for example, to say, “I shall believe in him only if it is clear to me that he is telling the truth.” It is obvious that one who utters such a statement is not yet a believer in the Prophet, for he has placed a condition on his belief. The only faith (*īmān*) that is true faith is a comprehensive, certain, unconditional faith in all that the Prophet says, as the Qur’ān itself attests to in

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya mentions seven ways of which I have here summarized three. See: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 177-92.

many of its verses. Those who reject anything that comes from the Messengers, based on what they perceive as their own guidance, have been chastised in numerous verses, as in Q. 6:124; 40:82-85; 18:56, and others.

**Eleven:** Much of what people consider as evidence, from rational and Scriptural sources, is in actual fact not evidence, but only assumed to be such.

Ibn Taymiyya points out that those who followed the Book and the Sunna agreed that these two sources are the bases for affirming God's Attributes and other aspects of belief, and in fact even those who opposed them from the people of *kalām* did not disagree with this basic premise – that the Scripture is indeed a source of evidence. What they disagreed about was that certain aspects of the Scripture appeared at odds with reason. Yet, it has already been shown that they themselves do not have a congruent understanding of that they called 'reason'.

So, if the situation is like this, and Scripture is universally agreed upon as being an evidence, whereas intellectual proofs are not universally acknowledged or agreed upon as evidence, then how can the latter hold more weight and be considered as contradicting the former?

Ibn Taymiyya points out that the 'People of Truth' (*Ahl al-Haqq*) do not impugn rational evidences *per se*, but rather evidences that are claimed by their opponents to be rational and which are assumed to contradict the Book and the Sunna, but are in actual fact not actual evidences.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 192-4.

**Twelfth:** Every single rational evidence that is claimed to contradict the Divine Law can be shown, through rational means, to be invalid. And if it can be shown to be rationally unsound, it cannot be used to oppose sound reason or explicit Scripture.

The particulars of this, of course, entails explaining the errors of the rational evidences that the opponents of *Ahl al-Sunna* put forward, and this, Ibn Taymiyya says, referencing himself and others, is an ongoing endeavor that people are doing.<sup>1</sup>

**Thirteenth:** Those matters in which it is claimed that the intellect opposes textual evidence – such as the Divine Attributes and the afterlife – are matters that are known by necessity that the Prophet was sent to explain. And that which is known by necessity from the religion of Islam cannot possibly be false, after one has affirmed that the Prophet came with the truth.<sup>2</sup>

**Fourteenth:** Definitive knowledge of the texts [i.e., revelation] is, in fact, possible, in particular amongst those who specialize in its sciences.<sup>3</sup> Facts that are narrated by numerous people (viz., in the transmission of which the level of *tawātur* is reached) yield definitive knowledge. Examples of this include the people's awareness of the bravery of Khālid b. al-Walīd, the poetry of Ḥassān b. Thābit, the grammar of Sībawayh, the medicine of Galen and the justice of the Caesar. In a similar light, people of faith and knowledge are in fact even more certain of the meanings of the Book of God and

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> This of course is the crux of the matter and the main point of contention between Ibn Taymiyya and his interlocutors. The *mutakallimūn* posit that a certain understanding of the text is *not* possible unless a number of stringent conditions have been met (al-Rāzī's discussion of this has preceded, in Chapter One, Section 3.3); Ibn Taymiyya viewed these conditions as being without evidence, and almost impossible to fulfill. He argues, in the *Dar'* and in other works, that the point of revealing a Book and sending a Prophet is so that God's message can be plainly and clearly conveyed to the people.

the sayings of the Prophet than, say, the people of medicine are with the intent of Galen's writings.<sup>1</sup>

**Fifteenth:** The binary division of an evidence being either 'God-given' (*Shari'i*)<sup>2</sup> or 'rational' ('aqlī) is false. These two sources do not logically contradict each other, for the opposite of 'God-given' (*Shari'i*) would be 'innovation' (*bid'i*).

Additionally, characterizing an evidence as 'religious' or 'rational' is not meritorious *per se*. That is because the religious evidence requires the intellect to understand it, and many religious evidences are in fact rational. In other words, no normative judgment is beyond the purview of the *shari'a*, since the *shari'a* endorses valid reason. Similarly, no normative judgment is beyond the purview of reason, since understanding *shari'a* requires reason.

This illustrates another major fallacy that the people of *kalām* fall into, which is that they divide religious knowledge into two categories: that which can only be derived from Scripture (viz. *sam'iyyāt*), and that which can be derived from the intellect (viz. '*aqliyyāt*). This is necessarily false, for the Qur'ān itself alludes to rational proofs (Q. 41:53), prohibits evidences that are not based on sound premises or certain knowledge (Q. 17:36 and Q. 3:66), and prohibits disagreement once the truth has become clear (Q. 7:6 and Q. 18:56).

Thus, it is not allowed to contradict a religious evidence with any other evidence, for to permit this is the same as permitting a statement from other than a prophet to contradict the statement of a prophet.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 195-197.

<sup>2</sup> By *shari'i*, Ibn Taymiyya means all that God reveals through His Prophet, which, for him, includes Qur'ān and hadith. This shall be discussed in a later section in this chapter.

**Sixteenth.** Those who posit a contradiction between reason and revelation must resort to either metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*) or allege that the true meaning of Scripture is unknowable (*tafwīd*). The error of both of these approaches is patently clear.<sup>2</sup>

The only valid type of interpretation (*ta'wīl*) would be one in which the intent of the speaker is demonstrated and shown; however, the interpretations posited by these groups offer no evidence that either God or His Messenger intended these. And this is precisely why the philosophers such as Ibn Sīna followed this approach of re-interpretation to its logical conclusion, claiming that the entire Qur'ān should be viewed in such a light. The heresy of this claim is manifestly clear, yet its logic is more sound than that of the *mutakallimūn* who seek to re-interpret the Divine Attributes but not, say, the bodily resurrection.

It is for this reason some of the *falāsifa*, such as Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 687/1288), claimed that there are only two legitimate schools: the school of the *Ahl al-Hadīth* which seeks to affirm everything at face value, and the school of the philosophers who assume that Scripture is entirely metaphorical in nature.<sup>3</sup>

Both the method of re-interpreting (*ta'wīl*) and of ignoring the meanings (*tafwīd*) are approaches that contradict the explicit claims of revelation about itself as being

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 198-200.

<sup>2</sup> For the issue of *ta'wīl*, see: EI2, 'ta'wīl', R. M. Frank, "Elements in the development of the teaching of al-Ash'arī," *Le Muséon* 104 (1991), p. 162, ft. 54. For a more detailed discussion in Ibn Taymiyya's writings of these issues, see his *al-Fatāwā al-Ḥamawiyya al-Kubra*, pp. 277-295.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 201-3.

knowable, explicit, and truthful. Hence, when the opponents resort to either of these methods, it is demonstrated that their premises are false.<sup>1</sup>

**Seventeenth:** Those who oppose the Scriptures with what they assume to be rational evidences intentionally use ambiguous words and vague terms that contain some truths and some falsehoods. And this, Ibn Taymiyya says, is in fact the nature of blameworthy innovations and the reason previous nations were led astray, for evil is only accepted if it is mixed with some truth. Ibn Taymiyya mentions that this is precisely what God accuses the People of the Book, the nations of God before the Muslims, of: ‘...mixing truth with falsehood’ [Q. 3: 71].<sup>2</sup>

It was precisely for this reason, says Ibn Taymiyya, that the early generations unanimously denounced the science of *kalām*, and the defenders of the prophetic traditions, such as Ibn Hanbal, refused to employ in their theological discussions vocabulary foreign to that used in Scripture. Rather, the proper methodology with such ‘non-religious’ words is to ascertain and verify what *meanings* are intended, and affirm those that are correct, whilst negating those that are incorrect.<sup>3</sup>

The religion of the Muslims, says our author, should be built upon submission to the Book of God, the Sunna of His Messenger, and the unanimous consensus of the

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 204.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 208-11. This is one of the longer points, spanning a total of seventy-one pages. Ibn Taymiyya delves into the meaning of ‘mixing’ (*iltibās*) truth with falsehood, and critiques logic for this very reason (pp. 211-20). He also gives an example of the differing definitions of God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) among the various groups, demonstrating that some of the definitions (in this case, of the Ash’arīs) actually condones directing prayers to other than God (pp. 223-8). Other examples that he discusses is that of the Beatific Vision (*ru’ya*) (pp. 247-52); God’s rising (*istiwā*) over His Throne and His presence above the Creation (pp. 252-3); God’s forcing (*jabr*) His creation to perform actions (pp. 254-6); the wordings (*lafz*) of the Qur’ān and whether these are God’s actual speech or not (pp. 256-69).

He shall return to this same issue in the next point and give examples of such ambiguous words.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 234-40.

Ummah,<sup>1</sup> for these are the only three matters that are free of error. Any other difference of opinion must be returned to the Book and Sunna.<sup>2</sup>

As for his opponents, Ibn Taymiyya writes, firstly, they reject the prophetic texts; secondly, they reject with these the intellectual proofs that actually intend to affirm these prophetic truths; thirdly, they take vague words and ambiguous statements as being the foundations of this religion; and, fourthly, they then pronounce deviancy or disbelief on those who oppose their innovated premises – premises that contradict both explicit Scripture and clear rationale.<sup>3</sup>

God has ordered Muslims, in many verses, to ponder over the Qur'ān, and He has informed them that He has revealed it so that they may understand it and reflect upon it. And it is only possible to ponder, understand, and reflect over speech that is understood by the intellect, as opposed to speech that is imprecise or unknowable.<sup>4</sup>

**Eighteenth:** This *Qānūn* may also be proven false by demonstrating that the rational arguments that are allegedly used to contradict Scripture are themselves invalid and self-contradictory. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya opines, whoever believes what these *mutakallimūn* posit about God, the prophets, or the Last Day, is the greatest ignoramus and utterly devoid of rational thought!

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<sup>1</sup> The invoking of unanimous consensus, or *ijmā'*, is interesting in light of the fact that Ibn Taymiyya was accused by his own opponents of breaking the Islamic consensus for a number of *fatwās* that he released (see for example: K. El-Rouayheb, "From Ibn Hajar al-Haytamī to Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī: Changing views of Ibn Taymiyya amongst non-Ḥanbali Sunnī scholars," p. 288). Nevertheless, theoretically Ibn Taymiyya, like all Sunnī jurists, affirmed the validity of *ijmā'* as an infallible source of Islam (see: *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 20, p. 210). Yet, he also claimed that there was no true *ijmā'* except when a Scriptural evidence existed, and that the only verifiable *ijmā'* was one that occurred during the era of the Companions. Any claim for *ijmā'* after this era, according to Ibn Taymiyya, could not be proven since the number of jurists and their dispersion through Muslim lands made such a verification impossible. See: *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 29, p. 195-6, p. 200, p. 298; al-Matroudi, *The Ḥanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah*, pp. 57-9.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 272.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 277.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 278.

This matter has been discussed and demonstrated at length in great detail in other works, and thus, Ibn Taymiyya excuses, he does not elaborate on this here. Suffice to say most of their arguments are based on ambiguous words that simultaneously contain elements of truth and falsehood, such as their claim that if God truly possessed Divine Attributes, such as Knowledge, and Power, He would then be a Composite Being (*murakkab*), and every composite being is in need of each of its parts, and the existence of any entity that is in need of its parts is not necessary by itself (*wājib bi-nafsihī*).<sup>1</sup> The founders of each of these movements took these concepts from their predecessors in their own tongues, whether Greek, Sanskrit, or Persian, and then Arabicized them – sometimes even mistranslating them! But Ibn Taymiyya takes pride in the fact that he will speak to people in their language, the language of the Scripture, i.e., Arabic. And if his opponents wish to mention foreign concepts (such as ‘matter’ and ‘essence’ and ‘substance’ and ‘body’ and ‘accident’, and so forth), then he shall point out the ambiguity and inherent vagueness in them.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also finds a sinister component to such pseudo-complexity. There is an intended tactic being employed here, which is that these groups all use ambiguities to extract premises and syllogisms which they then apply to arrive at their conclusions. By this tactic, they magnify the importance of these proofs and aggrandize them, intentionally confusing them for those who do not understand them. And, Ibn Taymiyya admits, there is no doubt that these proofs are complex and convoluted, such

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<sup>1</sup> What follows is a detailed analysis of some such ambiguous concepts, such as: *tarkīb* as applied to God (*DT*, vol. 1, pp. 280-282); the *tawhīd* of the *falāsifa* and the concept of Platonic Universals (*DT*, vol. 1, pp. 282-292); the nature of God’s ‘Existence’ (*wujūd*) (*DT*, vol. 1, pp. 292-295); and the proof of His existence amongst the *mutakallimūn* and the *falāsifa* and how these proofs were the primary cause of these groups rejecting the explicit text of the Qur’ān (*DT*, vol. 1, pp. 301-317). This latter point, in particular, will be taken up again in Chapter Three.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 301.

that when a student is informed of these proofs, and he instinctively finds fault with them (i.e., his *fīṭra* tells him that these proofs are not true), he is reminded that he is not qualified to understand, and that perhaps these sciences are not meant for his study! Thus, his ire is raised, and his ego forces him to submit to these evidences before they are verified in his eyes, and he is fearful of opposing them in order to avoid accusations of intellectual imbecility. It is in this manner that they surreptitiously lure people in, bit by bit, to their theologies.<sup>1</sup>

**Nineteenth:** One basis of all of these rejections (i.e., of the literal meaning of Scripture) stems from the issue of composition (*tarkīb*), and the error of this has already been demonstrated. The other basis of these rejections – meaning the Proof of the Existence of God from the Createdness of Movement and Accidents – can also be refuted.<sup>2</sup>

**Twentieth:** It can be shown the groups that denied the Divine Attributes and attempted to oppose Scripture used the exact same methodology that the ‘heretical materialists’ (*al-dahyriyya*) used in denying Resurrection. These groups claimed that whatever information the prophets came with regarding Day of Judgment cannot be

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 295–6.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 320. Again and again, Ibn Taymiyya brings up the issue of the corollaries that result from the various proofs for the existence of God employed by the *mutakallimūn*. It is these corollaries, Ibn Taymiyya states, that form the basis of their re-interpretation of the texts, and even their need to formulate the *Qānūn*. An example that proves this point is the *Introduction* of al-Rāzī’s *Taṣīṣ*, in which he attempts to prove that God cannot be a corporeal entity (*jism*) and then spends most of the work attempting to re-interpret Divine Attributes that, to him, would impute a *jism* to God.

What follows is over one thousand pages of discussion regarding this issue – covering the last 80 pages of this volume, and the entirety of the next three volumes (viz. volumes two, three and four) of this edition. The next point of the *Dar'*, the twentieth, begins with the beginning of volume five.

Ibn Taymiyya’s views on the Proof of Accidents, its premises (including the issue of infinite regressions, or *tasalsul*), and its corollaries, is the topic of Chapter Three, Section 1.2. For this reason, we shall skip over these next thousand-plus pages, and resume our summary of the *Dar'* from the beginning of volume five of the printed edition.

taken as yielding definitive information. They then used these same arguments to reject the Laws that they have been commanded with, such as the prayer, charity and the fast, claiming that such Laws were for the masses, and not for the elite.<sup>1</sup>

This belief eventually led the *falāsifa* to reject the three fundamentals that all Divinely revealed religions agree upon: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment, and righteous actions. Some amongst them, such as Ibn ‘Arabī, claimed that all existence was but one, the existence of God being nothing other than the existence of creation, and thus negated a Creator.<sup>2</sup> Those arguing for this followed neither the Qur’ān nor sound reason, to the extent that some from amongst them, such as al-Tilmisānī, performed the prohibited deeds and abandoned the obligatory ones. Yet, the true and famous scholars of *taṣawwuf*, such as al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyāq, Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī, al-Junayd b. Muḥammad, and Sahl b. ‘Abdullāh al-Tustarī, are the furthest removed from such beliefs.

This trend of re-interpreting Scripture began – as al-Shahrastānī pointed out – when people began preferring their own opinions even over explicit texts, and this practice spread among various groups of *kalām* and *taṣawwuf*, taking off in particular with the heretical Ismā‘īlī Shī‘īs. The disbelief of this latter group, says Ibn Taymiyya, is a matter that no one, not even the Mu‘tazilīs or the [Twelver] Shī‘īs, deny, many having written books on their misguidance.

The point that is being made here is that these heretics (viz. the *falāsifa* and the Ismā‘īlīs) refute the *mutakallimūn* with precisely the same arguments that the

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 3.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Michel, “Ibn Taymiyya’s Critique of *Falsafa*,” *Hamard Islamicus*, vol. VI, No. 1 (1983), pp. 3-5.

*mutakallimūn* used against *Ahl al-Sunna*. Yet, when these *falāsifa* claim that Scriptural teachings about the afterlife and references to bodily resurrection are all metaphorical, the masters of *kalām*, such as al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, pronounce them to be apostates. However, these same masters do not acknowledge or realize that they also follow this very methodology when it comes to the Attributes of God. For both groups claim that the Sacred Texts did not inform people about theological topics in a clear and unambiguous manner, and that these texts convey information that cannot be understood at face value, and must be re-interpreted by the scholarly elite.

Ibn Sīna's *al-Risāla al-Adhāwiyya* serves as a good example to illustrate this.<sup>1</sup>

For Ibn Taymiyya, this demonstrates that the masters of Sunnī *kalām*, such as al-Rāzī, are inconsistent, for they deny the reality of the Scripture when these texts deal with the Divine Attributes while accepting them in matters of the afterlife; moreover, they deem Ibn Sīna and his ilk as apostates, while they themselves do what Ibn Sīna does.<sup>2</sup>

**Twenty-First:** To oppose the statements of the prophets with the opinions of men, and to give precedence to the latter over the former, is, Ibn Taymiyya writes, the methodology of those who reject the prophets. In fact, as al-Shahrastānī also points

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 10-13. This section of the *Dar'* has been translated by Yahya Michot in "A Mamlūk Theologian's Commentary on Avicenna's *Risāla Adhāwiyya*," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 14:2 (2003), pp. 149-203.

<sup>2</sup> What follows is another extensive and important theological deconstruction in which Ibn Taymiyya pits later Ash'arīs, in particular al-Rāzī and al-Āmidī, against Ibn Sīnā, arguing that Ibn Sīnā's criticisms against the Ash'arīs is in fact correct. Of course, Ibn Sīnā himself is then refuted. See: DT, vol. 5, pp. 3-204.

out, the basis of all evil emanates from opposing the texts with opinions, and from preferring one's own beliefs over the Sharī'a.<sup>1</sup>

This is the explicit Qur'ānic message as well (Q. 6:130; Q. 20:123-6, and Q. 40:4-5).<sup>2</sup>

**Twenty-Second:** God criticizes the people of disbelief because they do not follow the path of God, considering it to be misguided (lit. 'crooked'). Therefore, anyone who presumes that rational proofs are directly opposed to the prophetic message clearly also presumes that the path of God is misguided.<sup>3</sup>

**Twenty-Third:** The Qur'ānic message clearly describes itself as being guidance, and informs mankind that prophets are sent to bring out people '*from darknesses into light*' (Q. 14:1). So it can be posited that the prophets either succeeded in preaching doctrines that brought about this light, or they did the opposite and preached falsehoods, or they remained silent regarding these matters and did not preach.

The last two scenarios, Ibn Taymiyya opines, cannot be attributed to any believer in the prophets of God. Yet, this is the presumption that those denying the Divine Attributes are inevitably explicitly stating, or implying. And this is in direct contrast to how the Qur'ān describes itself.<sup>4</sup>

**Twenty-Fourth:** The very definition of Islam as 'submission to God' requires belief in the teachings of God and His Prophet. Ibn Taymiyya states that making this submission contingent upon one's rational confirmation of the unseen truths

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Shahrastānī writes, "Know that the first doubt that ever occurred in the creation was the doubt of Iblīs – may God curse him. And its source was his preferring his opinion over an explicit text (*nass*), and his desires over a command." See his *al-Milal wa-l-Nihāl*, ed. Aḥmad Fahmī Muḥammad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1992), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 204-209.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 5, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 211-14.

contradicts this belief. In fact, if it were to be allowed, then each individual would be permitted to reject any aspect of the faith that he was uncomfortable with. Moreover, people's intellects and understandings are varied and divergent, and specious arguments are never-ending. The Qarāmiṭa (i.e. Isma'ilīs) are a prime illustration of those who fell prey to this type of heresy.<sup>1</sup>

**Twenty-Fifth:** The Qur'ān clearly mentions that direct opposition to the Revelation is a hallmark of Satan, as in Q. 6:112-5. And whoever contemplates this verse will realize that it also applies to anyone who opposes the speech of the prophets with his own speech – each according to his own situation.

Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya says, any person who opposes or dislikes anything that the Prophet has come with has a share of this Satanic methodology, just like the more one loves the Prophetic message, the more righteous one shall be.

In fact, the message of all the prophets with regards to the Divine Attributes is the same, and it is for this reason that the Prophet and His Companions never criticized the Old Testament for its descriptions of God, since the Torah agrees completely with the Qur'ān in this regard; furthermore, it is authentically reported that the Prophet agreed with one of the rabbis when he narrated some of the Divine Attributes.<sup>2</sup> This is

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 214-5.

<sup>2</sup> Reference is here being made to the tradition in the Ṣaḥīḥ of al-Bukhārī, The Book of Tawḥīd, Chapter: Regarding the Verse: God Grasps the Heavens and Earth, (vol. 9, p. 447, hadith no. 7451):

Ibn Mas'ūd narrated: "A rabbi from the Jews came [to the Prophet] and said, 'On the Day of Resurrection, God will place all the heavens on one finger, and the Earth on one finger, and the waters and the land on one finger, and all the creation on one finger, and then He will shake them and say, "I am the King! I am the King!"' I saw the Prophet smiling until his molar teeth were visible, expressing his amazement and his belief in what he had said. Then the Prophet recited [the verse]: 'No just estimate have they made of God such as is due to Him ... [Q. 39:67].'"

Ibn Taymiyya is alluding to the Prophetic affirmation of God grasping the Heavens in His hand and with His fingers (Ar. *isba'*). In accordance with *Ahl al-Hadīth* theology, early scholars considered these texts as being literal. See for

in contrast to the negators (*viz. mutakallimūn*), who considered these Scriptures to have been corrupted in their entirety.<sup>1</sup>

**Twenty-Sixth:** The revelation explicitly condemns the People of the Book for concealing, denying, altering, or misunderstanding God's words (e.g. Q. 2:75-79). And each one of these four concepts is found in those who turn away from the Scripture and impute to follow their own intellect. Ibn Taymiyya writes that some amongst these groups have been known to fabricate traditions, and many amongst them have no knowledge of the Prophetic ḥadīth, nor do they bother themselves with studying them in the first place. And as for their re-interpreting the meanings of the Scripture, this is simply too common to even begin to list. Misunderstanding the Scriptures is also prevalent; sometimes this is done by explicit *ta'wīl* and other times by ignoring the text and assuming it has no import at all (*tafwīd*).<sup>2</sup>

Now, Ibn Taymiyya reassures us, this does not mean that it is impermissible to question a given ḥadīth or to attempt at reconciling potential problematic interpretations that might be derived from it. Indeed, the Companions themselves regularly challenged each other's understandings of Qur'ānic verses and ḥadīth, so much so that they occasionally questioned the Prophet himself regarding something he had said in light of a Qur'ānic verse.<sup>3</sup> However, in all of these recorded instances, it is

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example, the creed of Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Iṣhāq b. Khuzayma (d. 311), *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd wa Ithbāt Ṣifat al-Rabb*, ed. 'Abd al-Azīz b. Ibrāhīm al-Shahwān (Riyāḍ: Maktaba al-Rushd, 1994), Chapter 28: The Affirmation of Fingers to God, pp. 187-207.

<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 216-222. The reference, of course, is to the Divine Attributes presented in the Old Testament; Ibn Taymiyya believes that these Attributes confirm the Qur'ānic message, even if other passages of the Old Testament are corrupted.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 223-7. These four 'pillars' of hermeneutical reinterpretation are decried by Ibn Taymiyya in numerous places, most notably in his *Wāsiṭiyā*, pp. 93-6, and *Fatāwa al-Ḥamāwiyya*, pp. 271-3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya proceeds to give a number of examples for these; see *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 228-231.

clear that they were attempting to interpret *in light of* another verse or ḥadīth. Never do we find even one of them declaring a ḥadīth problematic on the basis that it did not suit his intellect, and this latter point is one Ibn Taymiyya seeks to emphasize.

**Twenty-Seventh:** Ibn Taymiyya classifies all those who wish to prove that revelation contradicts reason into one of two groups. The first are the philosophers, their basic premise being that the Prophet did not speak the clear truth to the masses. The necessary consequence of this claim is the invalidation of any Law – there is nothing that is prohibited or prescribed. And this claim is something that every Muslim knows to be false. The second are the people of *kalām*, and they are people who follow the Law and are ascetically inclined. They approach revelation via their understanding, re-interpreting (*ta’wīl*) it via a unique understanding not found in the classical tradition. They define *ta’wīl* as ‘*Overlooking the apparent meaning of a word for an obscure meaning*’; however, this definition contradicts Qur’ānic usage of *ta’wīl*.<sup>1</sup>

They base their use of *ta’wīl* on two premises. First, they claim that it is necessary in some texts, and they then attempt to demonstrate this either by the use of fabricated or weak traditions (such as the ḥadīth ‘The Black Stone is God’s right hand on earth’<sup>2</sup>) or through their misunderstanding of authentic texts (such as the ḥadīth, ‘God will ask His servant: I was hungry, yet you did not feed me,’ for in that very ḥadīth, the latter portion clarifies what this phrase means, since God says, ‘Such-and-such a servant of

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> This tradition is reported in some of the tertiary ḥadīth works (for example, in the *Awṣat* of al-Ṭabarānī vol. 1, p. 23), and has generally been considered a fabricated or extremely weak (*wāḥī*) tradition. For details from a traditionalist’s perspective, see al-Albānī’s discussion of it *Silsila al-Āḥādīth al-Ḍa’īfa wa-l-mawḍū‘a* (Riyāḍ: Maktaba al-Mā‘arif, 1992) vol. 1, pp. 390-3.

mine was hungry, and you did not feed him, for had you fed him, you would have fed me.’<sup>1)</sup>).

Secondly, they claim that anything they do not rationally agree with must be a text on which *ta’wīl* must be done.<sup>2</sup> However, they do not possess a clear and precise rule by which they can identify texts requiring this reinterpretation and those that may be accepted at face value, resulting in many contradictions in their works. What they unite in, however, is the incompatibility of taking the Prophet as the ultimate arbiter in this field, rather their arbiter must be an ‘intellect’ that is constantly changing from person to person.

**Twenty-Eighth:** Ibn Taymiyya opines that the ultimate result of conceding a contradiction between revelation and reason in theological-intellectual matters (*masā’il ilmiyya*),<sup>3</sup> and then privileging reason, is to construct revelation as being entirely impotent, even in matters that are beyond these. In fact, this may then lead to one denying any certain knowledge to be yielded from any factual statement of God or His Messenger, for even if such a person lacks any intellectual argument in contradicting such a statement, there is always the possibility that a later argument will be discovered by another person. This is because what they term ‘intellectual proofs’ are without limit, nor can any one person claim to master all such proofs. Moreover, each

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<sup>1</sup> A famous tradition reported in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim, The Book of Righteousness and Manners; *Chapter: The Blessings of Visiting the Sick*, ḥadīth 2569.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 234-6.

<sup>3</sup> Here, Ibn Taymiyya allows the Ash’arīs their claim that they do take the Texts literally in matters of Law (viz., *masā’il al-‘amaliyya*). However, for Ibn Taymiyya, while the faith of the Ash’arīs prevents them from re-interpreting the texts in other matters, the *falāṣifa* had no such qualms (or faith!) that prevented them from doing so. Ibn Taymiyya views the foundational principles as being the same; it is merely in the degree of application that the Ash’arīs differ with the *falāṣifa*.

group claimed that it, and it alone, possesses the ultimate intellectual proofs by which the texts need to be judged.<sup>1</sup>

The point here, Ibn Taymiyya stresses, is that anyone who considers the possibility of intellectual proofs trumping some of God's and His Messenger's speech will never be certain of *any* of their speech. Thus, those who oppose and turn away from the Book are Sophists when it comes to rational proofs, and Qarāmiṭa when it comes to textual proofs.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya underscores that he wishes to demonstrate the falsity of this premise, sometimes through faith-based proofs and Qur'ānic arguments, and sometimes through rational arguments that can be understood by those who do not take the Qur'ān or faith-based arguments as evidence. He feels that – through God's grace – he has clarified in a manner that cannot be refuted the speciousness of the arguments that are commonly used by the philosophers and the Jahmīs, and states that anyone with pure intellect can detect the fallacy of what they rely on.<sup>3</sup>

**Twenty-Ninth:** Reason is both a necessary product (*malzūm*) of the knowledge of the *Sharī'a* and a necessary pre-condition (*lāzim*) for knowing it. The existence of the

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 242-4. For the next thirteen pages (5, pp. 244-56), Ibn Taymiyya pits various groups and theologians against each other, from the *falāsifa* to the Ash'arīs and the Mu'tazilīs, attempting to demonstrate that each group or theologian held a variant understanding of what they deemed to be 'intellectual proofs'.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 5, p. 256. This is a common phrase that Ibn Taymiyya mentions in many of his works: *yusafsītūn fī-l-'aqliyyāt wa yuqarmītūna fī-l-naqlīyyāt*, by which he means that Scripture carries no real weight, and the intellect that they claim to follow is ever-changing and flimsy.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 5, p. 258.

*Shari'a*, on the other hand, is independent of reason, and if reason had not existed, it would not signify the absence of the *Shari'a*.<sup>1</sup>

**Thirtieth:** It has already been demonstrated by what has preceded that the Divine Law cannot contradict the intellect that indicates its very truth – rather, both are necessarily true. And this is a matter that no believer in God and in His Prophet can deny.

Yet, the deniers of some of the Divine Attributes and Divine Actions effectively hold that affirmation of the revelation is not possible without rejecting part of it, which is a contradiction.<sup>2</sup>

**Thirty-First:** Al-Rāzī, in his work *Nihāya al-'uqūl*,<sup>3</sup> mentions that certain matters, such as the existence God, are impossible to verify through Scripture, for this would lead to blind faith, and thus belief in such matters must, instead, be arrived at via intellectual arguments. It is these intellectual arguments that are the basis for validating Scripture when it discusses God, after which God's Attributes can be affirmed, then God's sending of prophets, and then, according to al-Rāzī, one may affirm the statements coming from the Prophet.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 268-9. This is an ingenious point in which Ibn Taymiyya wishes to prove that the *Shari'a* is superior to '*aql* in that '*aql* is needed to both understand and commit to the *Shari'a*, whereas the *Shari'a* has no similar dependence on human rationale. His point, therefore, is that it makes no rational sense to take that which is less privileged, and use it to undermine that which is more privileged.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 286-8.

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished. It has been reproduced and edited in an MA thesis presented to the University of Cairo; as of yet I have not managed to obtain a copy.

<sup>4</sup> This is the standard *kalām* procedure for establishing the proofs of Islam. Perhaps the first Ash'arī theologian to put forward such a foundational framework was Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī in his *Kitāb uṣūl al-dīn*, although of course, al-Ash'arī himself did provide a rudimentary structure, as R. Frank has discussed in "Elements in the development of the teaching of al-Ash'arī," *Le Muséon* 104 (1991), pp. 141-185, and in R. Frank, "al-Ash'arī's 'Kitāb al-Hathth 'Alā al-bahth'," MIDEO, vol 18 (1988), pp. 99-103. We shall return to this subject in Chapter Three, Section 1.1.

Al-Rāzī mentions that there are five methods of affirming God's existence.<sup>1</sup> Through these methods, he concludes that God cannot possibly be a corporeal body (*jism*).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, for al-Rāzī, anything that Scripture says about God's Attributes that imputes a body to Him and contradicts these proofs must be rejected, since, al-Rāzī argues, we only know the truthfulness of the Prophet because of these very proofs.

However, Ibn Taymiyya points out that it is only the first three of these proofs that actually lead to a conclusion that God cannot have a corporeal body; the last two do not necessitate this conclusion. In fact, these last two proofs are closer to the Qur'ānic proofs for the existence of God.<sup>3</sup> That being the case, there is in reality no need to posit a contradiction between the Qur'ānic Attributes and the intellectual proofs for the existence of God.

Ibn Taymiyya points out that if someone were to claim that these proofs for God's existence do not, in fact, contradict the Divine Attributes mentioned in the Scripture, but that the Attributes are problematic because of other rational arguments, then this too can be responded to, in ten ways.<sup>4</sup>

**Thirty-Second:** Those who privilege any source of knowledge over revelation, whether rational ('aql) or experiential-mystical (*kashf*), effectively hold that revelation

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 292-4. The five proofs are: the proof from the Createdness of Essences (*hudūth al-dhawāt*); the proof from the Possibility of Bodies (*imkān al-ajsām*); the proof from the Possibilities of Attributes (*imkān al-sifāt*); the proof from the Createdness of Attributes (*hudūth al-sifāt*); and the teleological proof of God's Existence. We shall have occasion to return to this proofs and Ibn Taymiyya's comments on them in Chapter Three, Section 1.1 and 1.2.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs* is, of course, predicated on this very point; he uses the fact that God cannot be a *jism* to re-interpret dozens of Attributes.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 5, p. 295.

<sup>4</sup> See DT, vol. 5, pp. 295 – 320, for these ten ways.

is futile in providing knowledge in intellectual matters; this is tantamount to disbelief in revelation.<sup>1</sup>

This premise, claims Ibn Taymiyya, is also the foundation of the heretics (*zanādiqa*) and the esoteric *Ismāīlīs*, and it is, in essence, a rejection of all prophetic messages. And in fact, in some of the writings of al-Rāzī, such as his *Nihāya al-‘Uqūl*, there is talk of a similar nature, even though it is not to the level of the previous groups.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya claims that whoever allows an intellectual proof to negate a prophetic tradition will consequently forever remain in doubt with respect to all of the prophetic traditions, because intellectual proofs are infinite, and the possibility of discovering a new rational argument shall never be negated. And such a mentality clearly contradicts the very essence of having true faith in God and His Messenger, as numerous verses of the Qur’ān mention.<sup>3</sup>

**Thirty-Third:** Ibn Taymiyya states that it is known by necessity from the religion of the Prophet that God required Muslims to believe with certainty in whatever the Prophetic revelation informed of. For a believer to qualify one’s belief by one’s own rational confirmation, or by any other prerequisite, is by definition *not* belief, and is, according to Qur’ānic testimony, the state of all of those who belie the prophetic message. In fact, to claim that one will only believe in a statement of the Prophet after an external proof has proven that statement is, in essence, denigrating the Prophet to

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 320. In Point Twenty Eight, Ibn Taymiyya has already argued that effectively, al-Rāzī’s supra-rational category is arbitrary because different people disagree on what is within the purview of reason, and hence, effectively al-Rāzī’s contention reduces revelation to utter futility.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 329-35; here Ibn Taymiyya quotes several lengthy passages from al-Rāzī’s work to buttress this point.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 337-8.

the level of any jurist – jurists only accepting statements from other jurists *after* an evidence proves that statement.

For Ibn Taymiyya, this status that al-Rāzī confers to the intellect is the very same status that Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī and others ascribed to mystical experiences (*kashf*). Both groups claim that the Scriptures cannot be believed in until they are subjected to these external tests – and whatever of the Scripture is in conformity with it is accepted, and whatever is not shall be reinterpreted (*ta'wīl*). These are not, Ibn Taymiyya chastises, the presumptions of those who truly believe in the Prophet.<sup>1</sup>

**Thirty-Fourth:** Those who posit a clash between reason and revelation and then formulate such a *Qanūn* to resolve it actually have no need for it, writes Ibn Taymiyya. This is because this *Qanūn* would only be needed if these groups affirmed three matters: firstly, that they genuinely affirmed the prophethood of the Prophet; secondly, that they believed the Prophet spoke the particular statements that they find troublesome; and, thirdly, that the Prophet intended those problematic meanings in the first place. Only when one affirms all three of these premises does he need to posit what should be done in case of a conflict.

Yet, Ibn Taymiyya points out, none of those who put forward such a conflict affirm these premises. Some, such as Ibn Sīna, do not actually affirm a revelation

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 338 – 40. These last several points are devoted to emphasizing and over-emphasizing one point: that the later Ash'arite's *Qānūn* amounts to rendering the Prophetic revelation futile and ineffective, and hence amounts to disbelief.

Now, it is well-known that Ibn Taymiyya did not consider the Ash'arīs disbelievers, rather he granted them that they had intended to defend the Sunnī orthodoxy against its myriad enemies. Why, then, does he continue to hammer on the potentially heretical implications of these propositions? In the present author's view, these poignant and incisive arguments are calculated as a "shock treatment" for the sympathizers of later Ash'arīs like al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī. Of course, the Ash'arī followers would never concede that their masters have rejected or undermined the revelation, but as the Ash'arī masters' own frequent regret, reversals and pessimisms show, Ibn Taymiyya had identified their weakest spot: their guilt that they had undercut the very orthodoxy they had desired to defend.

revealed to prophets, claiming that prophecy is acquired and that the prophets imagine their revelations; others, such as al-Farābī, are even worse, since they claim that the prophets know the truth to be contrary to what they say. Al-Rāzī, on the other hand, claimed that one can never truly know the intent and meaning of the speech of the Prophet.

The point here, Ibn Taymiyya stresses, is that if it is denied that Revelation communicates an ultimate truth or a particular intended meaning to begin with, to discuss its contradiction with reason is meaningless and self-contradictory. Rather, these protagonists must affirm a true and unconditional faith in the statements of the Prophet before they claim there might be a conflict with these statements and what they call reason.<sup>1</sup>

**Thirty-Fifth:** It can be pointed out, says Ibn Taymiyya, that their *Qanūn* is inconsistent, and anything that is inconsistent must be false.

That is because all those who follow any version of the *Qānūn* seek to re-interpret some texts to the exclusion of others – for there is no group that has any allegiance to Islam that seeks to re-interpret *all* of the Scripture.<sup>2</sup> So, Ibn Taymiyya questions, if this is the case, they can be asked: on what basis do some texts qualify for re-interpretation, and others do not? To this, they can only give one of two answers.

The first answer is the one that the majority of them offer, and that is to claim that they will metaphorically interpret only those statements of revelation that are

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 41-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya charges the *falsāfa* with this very belief; therefore, it is clear from this paragraph, and from his other writings, that he does not consider them to be Muslims (since they clearly do not have any ‘allegiance to Islam’).

definitively contradicted by reason. This claim, Ibn Taymiyya points out, he has already responded to previously.<sup>1</sup>

The second possible answer could be the opposite of the first: that every revealed statement is metaphorically interpreted except if the meaning of a statement is known indubitably. The problem here, he stresses, is that there can be no basis for this certain knowledge: what is known with certainty to one group is often claimed to be contradicted with certainty by another.

For Ibn Taymiyya, this reality is clearly demonstrated when one examines these miscellaneous groups, in particular when it comes to the Divine Attributes. None of these groups has a precise rule ('*qanūn*') that they employ in demarcating which Attributes should be re-interpreted and which should not, and the logical conclusion to their lack of methodology is the permissibility of re-interpreting *all* Attributes.

Ibn Taymiyya re-iterates that this is in essence a suspension of the status of the Prophet as a true prophet of God, and is more akin to placing him on the level of a jurist *vis-à-vis* other jurists: only after the jurist brings some evidence will another jurist accept his opinion.<sup>2</sup>

**Thirty-Sixth:** Ibn Taymiyya argues, if the proponents of the *Qānūn* turn away from revealed arguments then they are only left with one of two paths: either the way of the rationalists (*nuzzār*), being based on the methodology of rational arguments, or the way of the *Ṣūfīs*, which is based on the methodology of experiential worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Here he summarizes arguments Twenty-Eight and Thirty-Two: that this necessitates suspending belief about the entire Scripture, since the human intellect is always discovering new matters and these might potentially conflict with Scripture.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 343 – 5. There is, of course, some repetition here with point Thirty-Three.

Whoever has tried these knows that anything from these methods that opposes the Book and the Sunna is full of contradictions and false premises.

So the end-result of the former is doubt and uncertainty (*shakk*), and the end-result of the latter is fanciful thoughts (*shāth*).<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Ibn Taymiyya points out that al-Ghazālī, in his *Iḥyā'*, admits that the Ash'arīs, Mu'tazilīs, and *falāsifa* all rely on progressively greater degrees of metaphorical interpretation of the revelation, and the only way, according to him, to know that the Ash'arī way is the true way is via a divine light (*nūr ilāhi*) that God bestows on His chosen servants, and which cannot be obtained from the Scripture. Al-Ghazālī states that whoever relies solely on the transmitted texts will never find a lasting solution to this problem.<sup>2</sup>

For Ibn Taymiyya, this stance implies that nothing of theological importance can ever be derived from Prophetic knowledge, and this, he points out, is the foundation of disbelief. This is not to deny, however, that God can bestow hidden knowledge on His chosen servants. However, for Ibn Taymiyya this knowledge must be in conformity with Scripture, otherwise there is no guarantee it is from God, as many of the true Ṣūfī sages of old remarked.<sup>3</sup>

**Thirty-Seventh:** It is a necessary consequence of the aforementioned proposition (viz., that textually revealed knowledge cannot be used in theological matters) that one should reject or question everything that the Prophet has said,

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 345-6.

<sup>2</sup> See al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*, vol. 1, pp. 104-8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya has a long discussion here on the reality of *kashf*, mentioning conditions for its acceptance and pointing out that much of it can also emanate from a powerful imagination. See: *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 349-57.

which, Ibn Taymiyya points out, is in essence a rejection of his prophethood. And every person, believer or unbeliever, recognizes that the message of the Prophet was sent to be believed wholly, and not to be challenged or rejected. Hence, for Ibn Taymiyya, as this necessary consequence is invalid, the proposition itself must be invalid.<sup>1</sup>

**Thirty-Eighth:** It is established, according to Ibn Taymiyya, that matters related to theology (*al-masā'il al-'ilmīyya*) are superior to and more important than matters related to law (*al-masā'il al-'amaliyya*);<sup>2</sup> in fact, the former is the crux of the prophetic messages. Now, if, as they claim, this theological knowledge cannot be verified from the Scripture, but instead one needs to turn to *kalām* theologians, philosophers or the Ismā'īlī esoterics for this, then that implies that it is this latter group that is more noble and blessed than the prophets of God who came with His message.

Ibn Taymiyya points out that this corollary has explicitly been mentioned by many of their leaders, such as Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn Sabīn, and the belief that a particular *shaykh* is better than the Prophet is common amongst many of the ignorant followers of these movements. And even those who do not reach such heretical implications in the eyes of Ibn Taymiyya, such as al-Ghazālī, do at the very least share the fundamental propositions of which these are inescapable corollaries.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 357-8.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya feels no need to prove this point as it is agreed upon by all of the theological schools of his day. In fact, the Mu'tazilī and Shī'ī spectrum of opinions on Islamic law reflect closely the spectrums within Sunnī schools (with some notable exceptions).

It is interesting to note that modern developments in the Islamic world, in parallel with developments in their Christian counterparts, seem to emphasize doctrinal differences less and less, and instead concentrate on ethical or legal issues as being of paramount importance.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 359-63.

**Thirty-Ninth:** Following on from the previous point, Ibn Taymiyya points out that had the Sacred Texts been silent about theological matters, the teachers of these groups would indeed have been nobler than the prophets. So what is one to assume when, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the Sacred Texts are in full contradiction to what these other groups claim, and describe God in a manner that is in direct opposition to these negators?

According to those who reject the apparent meanings of the Scripture, the statements of the prophets regarding the most noble of all matters (viz. the Divine Attributes) contain no guidance, but rather misguidance; it does not benefit, but rather harms; it does not purify, but rather corrupts. In fact, for Ibn Taymiyya, according to these people, the fabricated revelations that false prophets such as Musaylama claimed to be from God is more truthful than the Qur'ān itself, since these false revelations did not consist of false statements, but rather amused those who listened to them, even though they were false in their ascription to God.<sup>1</sup>

**Fortieth:** Any intelligent person knows that if someone addresses people in subjects such as medicine, mathematics, grammar, politics, ethics, geometry, etc., and emphasizes the significance of what he says, and claims to have clarified the truth to them, but in actual fact his speech is none of that, and instead he has told them the opposite of the truth, then such a person would be considered either the archetype of ignorance and misguidance, or the leader of deception and charlatanry.

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 364-9. Musaylama's 'revelation', at least as mentioned in classical sources, consists of witty and humorous passages, but is bereft of theological issues such as God's Attributes, nor does it contain any laws. Ibn Taymiyya points out that since such profound matters are missing from Musaylama's 'revelations', it appears that these 'revelations' would be more beneficial for mankind than the supposedly misleading statements from the Qur'ān.

How much greater, then, points out Ibn Taymiyya, would the misguidance be if that person speaks about the most important matters, those related to the Divine, and thus claiming to bring absolute guidance at God's command, with condemnation for those who reject him as ignorant and misguided?!

It is known to all that when a person says something that is contrary to reality, it is due to either his own ignorance, or an intentional desire to misguide, or an incompetence to explain. And the Prophet has been described in the Qur'ān as being the most knowledgeable, and the most sincere to guide, and the most eloquent.<sup>1</sup>

**Forty-First:** Every person who hears the Qur'ān – Muslim or not – knows that it claims to be the authoritative and exclusive guidance for success for those who follow it. The Qur'ān clearly states that those who reject its message are misguided, speaking without knowledge, and on a path of destruction.

Therefore, says Ibn Taymiyya, what should be made of one who speaks in direct opposition to what the Qur'ān has preached? As far as he is concerned, not only has such a person turned away from the Qur'ānic message, he has also supplanted it with false teachings that are at complete variance with its Divine message.

What adds insult to this arrogance is the assertion of some from this group that “the path of the later generations (*khalaif*) is more knowledgeable, and the path of the early generations (*salaf*) is safer.” However, this is because they are ignorant of the true path of the early generations (*viz.* the *salaf*), presuming it to be mere recitation of Scripture without understanding and meaning, and assuming that they (the *khalaif*) are

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 370-4. Ibn Taymiyya alludes to the fact that there are only three reasons why someone's speech may be rejected: the speaker may not be sincere, or he may not be knowledgeable, or he may not be eloquent. It is a given for Ibn Taymiyya that these three traits cannot be applied to either God or His Messenger.

the inheritors of a greater knowledge that allows them to misinterpret the words of the Scripture under the guise of *ta'wil*.<sup>1</sup>

**Forty-Second:** Yet another clear contradiction can be observed in their methodology. The proponents of the *Qānūn* argue that knowledge is of three types: that which can only be obtained through intellect; that which can only be obtained from Scripture; and that which can be obtained through both. And they claimed that Scripture is only effective in informing about matters whose existence and non-existence is possible.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, for Ibn Taymiyya, according to their own premises, they should deny the efficacy of Scripture in this category as well, since they have already shown that Scripture can be interpreted contrary to its explicit meaning if there is an intellectual proof that dictates this. It is not necessary for an actual proof to exist in order to divert the meanings of the Scripture to other meanings; the mere fact that this is *possible* shows that even in supra-rational matters, Scripture cannot be deemed as being authoritative due to the *possible existence* of such a conflict.

And thus, in this case, for Ibn Taymiyya this implies that one cannot resort to Scripture for matters of the Hereafter, and this is the pinnacle of disbelief!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 374-8. He follows this up with an important clarification of the meaning of *ta'wil* and its types. For Ibn Taymiyya, the Qur'anic meaning of *ta'wil* refers to the final reality, or the actualization, of a statement, whereas the *ta'wil* of the followers of the *Qānūn* implies averting the real meaning of a word to a secondary meaning. He then proceeds to illustrate this with many examples; see: *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 381-7.

<sup>2</sup> The rationalists did of course give some uninhibited role to the Scripture, in particular in matters that were deemed to be neither necessary nor impossible (and which they called the *sam'iyyāt*). An example of this for al-Rāzī is the punishment or rewards given to the soul in the grave. Since this is a matter that is possible, and since the Scripture has affirmed its existence, there should be no hesitation in believing that the soul is rewarded or punished in the interim between this life and the next. See al-Rāzī's *Kitāb Ma'ālim Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 387-9. What Ibn Taymiyya is arguing is that the Ash'arī theologians cannot hold, according to their own premises, the revelational information about supra-rational (unseen) matters such as afterlife as trustworthy,

The source of their misguidance, Ibn Taymiyya says, is that they have allowed what they consider ‘definitive reason’ to contradict definitive and explicit Scripture, and it is this concession that leads to all of their problems and confusions.

Another discrepancy is their claim of unanimous consensus when no such consensus exists, nor can it be proven. An example of this is al-Rāzī’s claim that there can be an existence that is neither inside of this world nor outside of it – yet every single statement from the prophets of God, and the Companions and the early generations would contradict this ‘consensus’ that he has claimed.<sup>1</sup>

**Forty-Third:**<sup>2</sup> Those who hold the possibility of a contradiction between reason and revelation cannot claim that both of these evidences are indubitable and definitive. In fact, no person of intelligence can claim that two definitive arguments contradict each other. Rather, Ibn Taymiyya points out, what they claim is that the textual evidences cannot yield indubitable certainty, and thus they will give precedence to these other evidences that they deem to be rational. And the consequences of these claims, and their necessary corollaries, have been discussed in previous points.

In order to refute this, there are three primary methods that Ibn Taymiyya followed:

*Firstly:* To prove the speciousness of their rational proofs, which they claim contradict the Prophetic message.

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nor should they be taken literally. This conclusion, as is well known, the Ash'arīs are not willing to concede, and in fact, deem as disbelievers the philosophers who hold such verses as being symbolic. So for Ibn Taymiyya it is a contradiction that the Ash'arīs consider Divine Attributes to be within the purview of rational reflection, and hence deny revelation's literal implications in that regard, but hold that the matters of afterlife are not without the purview of reason, and hence must be trusted literally.

<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 390-1.

<sup>2</sup> This second-to-last argument is spread over several hundred pages. The forty-third argument begins with the first page of the sixth printed volume, and concludes on page 140 of the seventh volume. Only a brief summary of its tangents will be offered here.

*Secondly:* To prove that the aspects of the faith that they deny are a necessary part of the Prophetic message; and it is a contradiction to claim belief in a Prophet while rejecting the truths that he came with.

*Thirdly:* To prove that clear intellectual arguments in fact corroborate what the prophets come with, without contradicting them.<sup>1</sup>

Now, these same people who use the *Qānūn* typically mention it when discussing the issue of God's transcendency ('uluww) and other such Attributes. But the evidences for God's transcendency above His creation are numerous and explicit – and Ibn Taymiyya adds that he has confounded his adversaries numerous times by mentioning them. Yet, despite the multiplicity of proofs for this issue from the Divine Texts, from Ibn Taymiyya's perspective, the proponents of the *Qānūn* do not have a single verse or tradition from the Prophet to support their claim. All that they cling to in this issue is what they perceive to be rational evidences, and this is the gist of what al-Rāzī himself says in his *al-Arba'īn*.<sup>2</sup>

**Forty-Fourth:**<sup>3</sup> The rational basis that is claimed to be the foundation of believing in the Scripture is itself, firstly, not rational ('aqlī), and secondly, invalid.

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 6, pp. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> What follows is a detailed affirmation of the Divine Attribute of Transcendence, with a refutation of al-Rāzī's and Ibn Sīna's positions. Ibn Taymiyya goes to great lengths refuting Ibn Sīna's notion of *al-quwwa al-wahmiyya* (imaginative faculties) being crucial in understanding God's nature; see: DT, vol. 6, pp. 6-59. This then leads Ibn Taymiyya to veer into a tangent and comment on Ibn Sīna's work *Maqāmāt al-'Ārifīn*, from which he chooses some passages to refute; see DT, vol. 6, pp. 59-87. Once this tangent is completed, he resumes discussing Ibn Sīna's notion of *al-quwwa al-wahmiyya*, DT, vol. 6, pp. 87-113. Then, he returns to proving God's Transcendence, relying not only on textual evidences but also statements from the early traditionalists and the founders of Ash'arī thought. By this, he attempts to demonstrate that later Ash'arī theology evolved and changed. Interspersed with these refutations are quotes from al-Rāzī's *al-Arba'īn*, which he attempts to refute, point by point. See: DT, vol. 6, pp. 113- vol. 7, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> This last argument is by far the longest argument of the *Dar'*, as it begins at vol. 7, p. 141 and lasts until the conclusion of the work, vol. 10, p. 319. It would be more precise to state that this is not one coherent argument, but rather a long and somewhat disjointed conclusion composed of numerous tangents. Some of these tangents will be discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

To clarify: the *mutakallimūn* claim that their proof for God's existence are the primary basis for believing in the veracity of Revelation; when one believes in these proofs, it is then rational to believe in the Scripture that conforms to them. Yet, these proofs themselves are not a necessary requisite for belief in the Scripture, moreover they are also invalid proofs.

They have two such proofs, and sometimes they add a third (although the third can actually be considered a variation of the first).

The first method is the 'Proof from Accidents (*hawādīth*)' – this is used to prove that bodies which contain accidents must also be created, since the premise is that there cannot be an infinite regression of causalities.

The second is the 'Proof from Composition (*tarkīb*)' – this proves that everything that is composed must be possible and generated, since whatever is composite must be possible and generated.

The third is the 'Proof from Particularization (*takhsīṣ*)' – this is used to prove the possibility of that which is particularized and its createdness, since the premise is that whatever has been particularized must have been done so by an actor separate from it.<sup>1</sup>

Each one of these premises is the subject of great dispute between the various groups of the scholastic theologians and the philosophers. Additionally, the very enterprise of scholastic theology is an innovated science that was condemned – as even the Ash‘arīs are forced to admit – by all reputable Sunnī scholars of the early

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 7, pp. 141-2.

generations.<sup>1</sup> The science of *kalām* is based on the premise that knowledge of God is not inborn, but rather externally acquired, and hence, for the scholastic theologians, the first obligation upon the rational mind is the obligation to deliberate and prove the existence of God. Some have even used the Qur'ānic account of the Prophet Abraham and his search for God via the celestial objects as being an evidence of this claim. Not only is the use of this evidence incorrect here, it also illustrates a misunderstanding of Abraham's dialogue.<sup>2</sup> There is in fact no imperative to prove God's existence, since the soul innately knows of His existence by knowledge gleaned from the *fitra* – the human disposition upon which God created man and into which every child is born, as the traditions inform us.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, all three of these proofs have implications that are false, and which are used by the *falāsifa* and *mutakallimūn* to negate God's Attributes mentioned in the Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

**Conclusion:** It is obvious, Ibn Taymiyya concludes, that those who claim to follow 'rational' thought have never agreed upon its actuality. However, he says that he is prepared to accept anything from them if it is supported with valid evidence,

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, pp. 145–352; this entire section is dedicated to quoting from and commenting on specific scholars that both Ash'aris and Ḥanbalis would look up to, such as al-Shāfi'i, al-Khaṭṭābī, and others.

<sup>2</sup> The Qur'ānic story of Abraham and its interpretations by both al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya shall be elaborated upon in Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

<sup>3</sup> Summarized from a lengthy – and multi-faceted – discussion, spanning one and a half volumes; see: *DT*, vol. 7, p. 353 to *DT*, vol. 9, p. 49. Some of these points will be referenced in Chapter 3, Section 2.2, which will discuss Ibn Taymiyya's conception of the *fitra*.

<sup>4</sup> This is the basic gist of the remaining two volumes (vol. 9, p. 50 to vol. 10, p. 317), where Ibn Taymiyya pits Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīna, al-Rāzī, and al-Suhrawardī against each other (along with quotes from other theologians), disagreeing with all of them and showing how they disagreed with one another.

regardless of whether that evidence is Scriptural or rational. As for claims that are known to be specious, these of course shall be rejected.

Ibn Taymiyya proceeds to address the reader directly, perhaps for the first time in this work. He says:

So it should be clear to you now that all groups that oppose the speech of the Law-Giver with what they call rational thought, in fact oppose it with false evidence, as most [true] rational thinkers will say. This is the case regardless of whether they oppose it outwardly or inwardly. And these thinkers will be able to refute what these groups say, with sound, proper rational evidence.

All of this is one of the methods by which God helps His Prophets and believers in this world, for God allowed in every group that opposes the Prophet those from within that same group who would show the speciousness of its own claims, and expose its ignorance and contradictions. Then, the warrior-believer (*al-mu'min al-mujāhid*) is able to proclaim *jihād* against these people, and can seek the aid of those who have already attacked the group from one angle by attacking it from yet another, even if he didn't explicitly seek the help of the first group of attackers, until eventually their land [*i.e.*, the beliefs of the opposing groups] is conquered! For God has facilitated victory and help for His followers, and indeed He is sufficient as a Guide and a Helper.

And with this the book is concluded, and all praise belongs to God, Lord of the World, and may peace and salutations be upon the Messenger.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 10, pp. 317-8.

## **1.2 A Thematic Overview of the Methodology and Contents of the *Dar'***

Ibn Taymiyya's forty-four points have, earlier, been presented in the order of his text. In this part, a holistic commentary on the *Dar'* in its entirety will be made, while noting some of the salient features of Ibn Taymiyya's methodology. An attempt will also be made at reorganizing Ibn Taymiyya's forty-four points around broader motifs.

One of the more familiar problems of the *Dar'* – or, to be more precise, with Ibn Taymiyya's writings as a general rule – is his somewhat disjointed style of moving from topic to topic. Not only does this make for difficult reading, it also results in repetitive arguments and overlapping tangents. This ‘disjointedness’ is often so pronounced that it becomes clear that Ibn Taymiyya neither drew a rough draft nor did he pen his thoughts prior to undertaking his writing of the *Dar'*; in fact one may legitimately observe the same with respect to all of his writings.

However, an absence of a draft does not imply that he was merely recording his thoughts haphazardly without a specified subject. A reading of the *Dar'* indicates Ibn Taymiyya had a clear conception of whom he intended to refute: namely, those who do not understand the Sacred Texts, and in particular, the texts dealing with the Divine Attributes, in a literal manner. He further classified this group into two categories for which he coined designations that he proceeded to utilize and refer to throughout his work. The first he called ‘*ahl al-takhyīl*’ (‘the People of Imagination’) implying thereby the philosophers and *Bāṭinīs*, so named because, as Ibn Taymiyya qualified, they deemed prophecy and revelation to be merely fanciful and imaginative outbursts from those proclaiming themselves prophets. The second he labeled ‘*ahl al-ta’wīl*’ (‘the People

of Interpretation'), indicating thereby the groups of *kalām*, in particular the Mu'tazilīs and Ash'arīs, since they always endeavored to 're-interpret' the explicit wording of the Texts.<sup>1</sup>

It also would be fair to say that Ibn Taymiyya had a clear vision of his overall methodology. For example, in the forty-third point, he states that he has attempted to follow three methods in refuting the *Qānūn*:

*Firstly:* To prove the fallacy of his opponents' rational proofs – proofs which his opponents claim contradict the Prophetic message.

*Secondly:* To prove that those who deny or distort the Sacred Texts are guilty of distorting texts dealing with aspects of the faith that are a necessary part of the Prophetic message. Hence, it is contradictory to affirm belief in the Prophet while rejecting the essential truths that he was sent to explain, such as the Divine Attributes.

*Thirdly:* To prove that clear rational arguments in fact corroborate Revelation without challenging it.<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, he states that his aim is to prove: (i) firstly, that the Qur'ān and Sunna contain truth and guidance; (ii) secondly, that the reinterpretations that his opponents offer for the Sacred Texts are invalid; (iii) thirdly, that the assertion that a rational argument can contradict the Sacred Texts is also invalid; and, (iv) lastly, that in fact the opposite is true in that reason supports revelation rather than challenges it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya introduces this binary classification in the very first pages of the *Dar'* (see vol. 1, p. 4), and then references them throughout the work.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, pp. 3-5.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 279.

It is also manifestly clear that Ibn Taymiyya has thoroughly read as well as carefully analyzed the writings and arguments of his opponents. Frequent and accurate quotations from their works are a salient feature of the *Dar'* and bear testimony to this fact. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya chooses to commence the *Dar'* with a lengthy quotation from al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs* wherein he formulated his *Qānūn*. This being the case, it is not uncommon for him to quote a page or more from the writings of those he sets out to refute, engaging with them point by point.<sup>1</sup>

A commonly employed technique that Ibn Taymiyya utilizes is to pit one group against another, or – even more ironically – to quote earlier scholars of one group as unwitting adversaries to subsequent scholars of that same group (in particular, the earlier Ash'arī founding scholars such as al-Baqillānī or al-Juwainī are quoted against later Ash'arī luminaries such as al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī). Ibn Taymiyya even refers to this method as a God-given technique that *Ahl al-Sunna* should avail themselves of.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya seems to highlight how the Ash'arīs agreed with the *falāsifa* in some of their opinions and in much of their methodology.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The most common works that he references and quotes from are the following:

- *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* of al-Rāzī. The *Dar'* having been written in response to this, it is – as a matter of course – the most oft-cited.
- *Nihāya al-'uqūl* of al-Rāzī (*DT*, 1/21, 2/244, 3/87, 4/290, 5/328, and 6/295)
- *Al-Muḥaṣṣal* of al-Rāzī (*DT*, 1/22, 4/290, and 8/179)
- *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* of al-Ghazālī (*DT*, 1/162, 2/213, 3/389, 4/281, 5/142, 6/210, and 6/350)
- *Al-Ishārāt* of Ibn Sīnā (*DT*, 5/87, 9/254, and 10/12)
- *Al-Risāla al-Adhāwiyya* of Ibn Sīnā (*DT*, 1/9, and 5/13 onwards, as he has dedicated point nineteen to this treatise)
- *Abkār al-afkār* of al-Āmidī (*DT*, 3/61, 3/182, 4/18, 5/110, 7/356, and 9/249).
- *Ghāya al-marām* of al-Āmidī (*DT*, 3/385).

Note that I do not claim this list to be exhaustive.

<sup>2</sup> See *DT*, vol. 10, p. 317.

<sup>3</sup> In particular, see the twentieth point: *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 3-203.

Ibn Taymiyya believes that it is essential to refute the claims of the opposing groups completely, to the extent that "...it cuts them off from their very roots,"<sup>1</sup> otherwise, from his perspective, a true believer has failed in defending Islam and has fallen short of what his faith and knowledge require of him. The implication is clear: Ibn Taymiyya viewed himself, through this work in particular, as having comprehensively defended the true teachings of Islam against the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* and there is little doubt that he considered himself as having demolished the *Qānūn* successfully.<sup>2</sup>

The forty-four points that Ibn Taymiyya employs in his offence against the *Qānūn* may be classified into six motifs, into which all but one fit:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> He expresses his humble pride in succeeding in his endeavor in *DT*, vol. 5, p. 258 as well.

<sup>3</sup> It goes without saying that it is extremely subjective to extrapolate broader motifs under which all forty-four points may be incorporated, and multiple interpretations may be given. I make no claims at an exhaustive study – the goal is merely to offer a more cohesive manner of understanding Ibn Taymiyya's modus in attacking the *Qānūn*.

Note that, in the following pages, the volume and page numbers for these points in the *Dar'* have not been referenced, as these may be found in the previous section. Also note that in a few cases, because of the broad nature of Ibn Taymiyya's reply, the same refutation was used in more than one category (in particular: the fourth, ninth, tenth, thirteenth, twenty-fourth, thirty-eighth, thirty-ninth and forty-second points).

General Themes	Arguments that employ these themes
<i>Faith-based arguments against the Qānūn</i>	5, 9, 10, 13, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 32, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 41
<i>Arguments that undermine the structure and premises of the Qānūn</i>	1, 2, 4, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16, 19, 27, 31, and 44
<i>Arguments resulting from problems inherent in defining the key terms 'aql and naql</i>	3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 18
<i>Arguments refuting what the Qānūn necessitates</i>	24, 28, 32, 38, 39, and 42
<i>Attacks against the practitioners of the Qānūn</i>	17, 20, 36, 38, and 42
<i>Arguments highlighting contradictions in the Qānūn itself</i>	4, 30, 34, 35, 42 and 43
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	29

**Table One:** A Thematic Overview of the Forty-Four Points of the *Dar'*

Clearly, *faith-based arguments* form the bulk of Ibn Taymiyya's forty-four points, with at least seventeen arguments exemplifying this motif. This in itself is indicative of the fact that Ibn Taymiyya knows his audience – this is not a work intended to convert outsiders to the faith, but one that seeks to appeal to fellow Muslims in deciding which version of the faith is correct.

A reader of Ibn Taymiyya's works cannot but notice his frequently resorting to and referencing from both the Qur'ān and the Sunna – hardly a few pages go by without some quotations. Typically, and as is standard for Ibn Taymiyya, when he quotes one verse, he follows it up with a few more consolidating his point.

The *faith-based* arguments may themselves be subdivided into two further categories: the first of which involves the Prophet, and the second the Qur'ān.

Ibn Taymiyya knows full well the sacrosanct status and position that the Prophet of God holds amongst Muslims, and he evidences this status effectively in his offence against the *Qānūn*. If the Prophet has spoken definitively, he argues (the *fifth* point), nothing can possibly contradict him; and suggesting so undermines the truth of his prophethood. For a Muslim, the essence of religion involves submitting to God and His Prophet (the *twenty-fourth* point), hence, a conditional belief in the Prophet is not true belief (the *tenth* point) – opposing him with one's own opinions or those of others (the *twenty-first* and *thirty-second* points), or qualifying one's belief in him with conditions (the *thirty-third*), is the tantamount to disbelieving in him. Moreover, posits Ibn Taymiyya, was not the Prophet sent to explain the very theological issues that the *mutakallimūn* hold as contradicting the Qur'ān and Sunna (the *thirteenth*)? So of what value, then, is the prophethood of the messenger when the implication of the *Qānūn* is that everything emanating from him is suspect until it is rationally verified (the *thirty-seventh* point)? For Ibn Taymiyya, true guidance is exclusively that which the Prophet has been sent with (the *ninth* point), and those who oppose his words are in fact imputing to themselves a nobler and higher status (the *thirty-eighth* and *thirty-ninth* points).

The second motif within the *faith-based* arguments that Ibn Taymiyya employs is the status and nature of the Speech of God: the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān offers numerous descriptions for itself as being the source of guidance, a light, and a mercy, yet the *Qānūn* – he clarifies – implies otherwise (the *twenty-third* point). The Qur'ān also

castigates those who oppose the Speech of God as following in the footsteps of Satan and his allies, yet this is what those ascribing to the *Qānūn* consequently fall into (the twenty-fifth point). It criticizes those who consider its message to be misguided (the twenty-second point), and it criticizes the Jews and Christians for doing what the followers of the *Qānūn* do: namely distort, deny and re-interpret Revelation (the twenty-sixth point). Essentially, those affirming the *Qānūn* impute to Revelation misguidance (the fortieth and forty-first points).

It is pertinent that despite these being primarily *faith-based* arguments, Ibn Taymiyya couches them in a very basic rational premise: for Ibn Taymiyya, it is illogical to believe in a Book as Divine, and ascribe prophethood to a man, and follow up this belief by questioning what emanates from them.

At least twelve of the forty-four arguments can be considered as concerted attacks on the *premises* upon which the *Qānūn* is based, and the *structure* of its wording.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, the single most important foundational premise upon which the *Qānūn* was built – in fact, the very premise *because* of which the *Qānūn* was formulated by the *mutakallimūn* – is their *kalām* cosmological proofs for affirming the existence of God and the necessary implications that arise from employment these methods. Some of the lengthiest of his forty-four points deal with this issue, including arguments *nineteen*, *thirty-one*, and *forty-four*.<sup>1</sup> Another false assumption that the practitioners of the *Qānūn* fall prey to by way of necessity is their claim that a definitive reading of the Sacred Texts is not possible, whereas for Ibn Taymiyya the opposite is the case (point *fourteen*).

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<sup>1</sup> These shall also be discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Ibn Taymiyya also underlines another erroneous logic upon which the *Qānūn* is premised: that the intellect either knows the Prophet to be true, or it does not. For those who hold the former to be the case, the *Qānūn* is illogical, for in essence they claim they must reject what the Prophet comes with in order for them not to reject his claim to be a prophet (point *four*). In fact it is *irrational* to rationally prove the Prophet as a Prophet, as the Ash'arīs do, and then use this same reason as the basis of opposing or denying what he says (point *six*). It is reason itself, according to the methodology of those ascribing to the followers of the *Qānūn*, that affirms the Divine origin of the Sacred Texts, hence reason should also dictate that precedence should be given to those very texts (point *ten*).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the application of the *Qānūn* is impossible without re-interpreting the Divine Texts in an illegitimate and illegal manner (whether that be through *ta'wil* or *tafwid*), and the employment of such exegetical devices is merely fanciful hermeneutical gymnastics in view of evading the apparent and literal meanings of the Scripture (points *sixteen* and *twenty-seven*).

As for the structure of the *Qānūn*, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that restricting possible outcomes of a potential conflict between '*aql*' and '*naql*' to four is false, for a fifth alternative is also possible (point *two*). He also argues that a binary distinction of knowledge into 'rational' and 'Scriptural' (first and fifteenth points) is invalid.

Yet another primary motif around which Ibn Taymiyya centers at least eight of his arguments is the *impossibility of clearly defining 'rationality' and 'reason'*. Reason ('*aql*) is not a single, indivisible entity (point *three*), and therefore each camp differs in its understanding and definition of what it designates as 'reason' (point *nine*). Additionally,

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<sup>1</sup> Although these points can also be used as examples of *faith-based* arguments, here Ibn Taymiyya is overtly bringing in the irrationality and illogical nature of the *Qānūn*.

rational judgments are not absolute, but rather relative, subject to variations in time, place, person and context - rather it is Revelation that is unchanging (point *seven*). Much of what is assumed as being rational evidence is, on further inspection, found to be otherwise (point *eleven*), and in fact can even be shown to be irrational (point *twelve*) or contradictory (point *eighteen*).

What is even more convincing for Ibn Taymiyya is that the Scriptural knowledge that the subscribers of the *Qānūn* deem contradictory to their intellectual proofs are the very topics that make up the core of the teachings of the Prophet and can only be known through divinely-revealed knowledge, including the Divine Attributes (point *thirteen*). How is it, he emphatically argues, that the sciences based purely on intellect, such as the physical sciences, do not contradict the Sacred Texts, yet sciences that are not based exclusively on intellect, such as theology, are being assumed to contradict Scripture (point *eight*)?

Yet another motif around which Ibn Taymiyya centers at least six of his points is *the objectionable corollaries that the Qānūn necessitates*. If each and every text from the Sacred Scriptures is suspect until verified by ‘*aql* or through the mystical experience of *kashf*, then the Divine status of the entire corpus of the Qur’ān is wholly compromised (points *twenty-eight, thirty-two, and forty-two*). This would also imply that each individual may have his own unique understanding of Islam, so that he would choose to follow what suited him and reject, at whim, what he disapproved of (point *twenty-four*). And if this is the case, then each person, in essence, becomes a prophet unto himself, circumventing thereby any need for God to send a prophet (points *thirty-eight* and *thirty-nine*).

At least five of Ibn Taymiyya's forty-four points may be considered as *attacking the methods and tactics of the formulators of the Qānūn*. Ibn Taymiyya charges them with intentionally using ambiguous phrases to deceive the masses (point *seventeen*), and of regularly claiming unanimous consensus when, in fact, no such consensus exists (point *forty-two*). He accuses them of either explicitly or implicitly pronouncing themselves more cognizant of the truth than the Prophet (point *thirty-eight*), even though their two pillars of *kalām* or *kashf* are bereft of any true value (point *thirty-six*). He outlines that they employ the very tactics of the materialists who deny God and the Day of Judgment, ironically accusing these same materialists of disbelief while they themselves fall into many of their errors (point *twenty*).

In at least seven of his arguments Ibn Taymiyya identifies *contradictions in the understanding and application* of the *Qānūn*. The only people who would need to resort to the *Qānūn*, he states, are those who do not truly believe in the Prophet as having spoken the indubitable and explicit truth, yet the upholders of the *Qānūn* claim to be believers (point *thirty-four*). It is impossible for them to claim that the Sacred Texts are indubitable and simultaneously claim rational proofs contradicting the Sacred Texts are also indubitable – whereas it is clear that by definition, an indubitable evidence cannot be contradicted by another (point *forty-three*).

Ibn Taymiyya also charges the practitioners of the *Qānūn* with being inconsistent in its application, selecting specific topics and verses to apply the *Qānūn* to, while accusing their opponents – who use the same *Qānūn* on different verses – with heresy or even disbelief (point *forty-two*). Ibn Taymiyya points out that no group claims that the *Qānūn* should be applied to the entire corpus of the Sacred Texts (point *thirty-five*).

In essence, the followers of the *Qānūn* hold that belief in Revelation is not possible without rejecting parts of it (point *thirty*). It is as if they are forced to state, “Reject what the Prophet says so that you do not end up rejecting what the Prophet says” (point *four*).

Through all of these motifs, Ibn Taymiyya attempts to show that the *Qānūn* makes no rational (*'aqli*) or textual (*naqli*) sense. In the next section, Ibn Taymiyya’s views on what constitutes ‘*aql*’ and ‘*naql*’ will be shown, and how he attempted to carve out a working relationship between them.

## *2. Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of ‘aql’ and ‘naql’*

### *2.1 Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of ‘aql’*

A discussion of Ibn Taymiyya's conception of ‘aql’ ought to be contextualized within preceding theological debates on this issue. It is pertinent therefore to highlight prior attempts at defining and elaborating on the notion of the human intellect by certain Muslim theologians. This will illustrate not only the sources that primarily influenced Ibn Taymiyya's thought, but will also serve to highlight his unique contribution to this field.

#### 2.1.1 The conception of ‘aql prior to the advent of Ibn Taymiyya

Islamic theologians and philosophers have discussed the definition and reality of ‘aql’ since the second Islamic century. This is partly due to the fact that the Qur’ān makes mention of the human intellect in numerous verses, and encourages man to ponder (*ta‘qīl*), think (*tafakkur*), contemplate (*tadabbur*) and reflect (*tadhakkur*). Additionally, there are references to ‘aql’ in ḥadīth literature.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion in this section will broadly outline some of the interpretations of ‘aql’ from Sunnī ḥadīth scholar, Ash‘arīs, Ṣūfīs, and the *falāsifa*.<sup>2</sup> The goal is to situate Ibn Taymiyya’s own views amongst those of his predecessors and also interlocutors.

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘aql’ linguistically was used to signify a hobbling cord that binds a camel (the common saying in pre-Islam was “aqaltu al-ba‘ira,” or “I restrained the camel”). This ‘restraint’ was then extrapolated to mean wisdom and intelligence, which was viewed as being that which restrains a man from acting foolishly.

See: Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, vol. 11, p. 459-461 for these and other derived meanings.

<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that I am not intending to give a comprehensive survey of the notion of ‘aql’ for the seven centuries prior to Ibn Taymiyya. That is an endeavor better suited for other dissertations. The goal of this section is merely to illustrate the primary trends in interpreting the notion of ‘aql’ from the various branches of Islam that Ibn Taymiyya was dealing with in the *Dar*. For overall surveys, the reader is referred to: A. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*,

While the standard ‘Six Books’ of Sunnī ḥadīth do not contain any narrations that either praise or disparage ‘*aql per se*, there are a number of traditions mentioned in other sources, typically those considered more apocryphal in nature, such as the *Kitāb al-‘aql* attributed to Dawūd b. al-Muḥabbar (d. 206/822),<sup>1</sup> many of which were used as evidence by the early Mu‘tazilīs in their works.<sup>2</sup>

However, these ḥadīth were regarded as spurious by mainstream traditionalist Sunnī scholars, including, for example, Ibn al-Qayyim, who claimed that every ḥadīth narrated about the blessings of ‘*aql* was fabricated. He pointed out that this was also the opinion of many earlier scholars of ḥadīth, such as Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), al-Dāraqutnī (d. 385/995), al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 438/1046), and others.<sup>3</sup>

One of the earliest – if not *the* earliest – attempts at defining the term ‘*aql* from within the Sunnī tradition was that of al-Muḥāsibī, who wrote an entire treatise on the

esp. pp. 61–86; *EI2*, s.v. ‘*Aql*’ (Tj. de Boer); *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. ‘*aql*’ (F. Rahman and W. C. Chittick); D. S. Crow, *The Role of al-‘Aql in Early Islamic Wisdom with Reference to Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation presented to the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1996), pp. 1 – 173.

<sup>1</sup> For the critical comments of the traditional scholars of ḥadīth on this work, see Aḥmad b. ‘Alī b. Ḥajr al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Zaybaq (4 vol., Jordan: Mu‘assasat al-Risālah, 1996), vol. 1, p. 570.

<sup>2</sup> Of the traditions reported in this work are, “When God created the ‘*aql*, He said to it: ‘Come forth!’, so it came forth. He then said to it, ‘Retreat!’ so it retreated. He then said to it, ‘Sit’, so it sat. He then said, ‘I have not created any creation that is better than you, or more noble than you, or more perfect than you, or that is more beloved to me than you. Through you I give, and through you I withhold, and through you I reward, and because of you I punish.’”

Another tradition records, “A person might be of those who pray and partake in *jihād*, and yet he will only be rewarded according to his ‘*aql*.’”

For these traditions in Sunnī sources, see Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Khaṭīb al-Tabrīzī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīh*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (Lebanon: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1995), vol. 3, p. 1306; and Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī l-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-‘aql*, (Beirut: Mu‘assasa al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1993), pp. 13–17.

There are also references to the ‘*aql*’ in Shī‘ī ḥadīth, again in a positive light. See *Encyclopedia Iranica*, s.v. ‘*aql*’ (F. Rahman and W. C. Chittick), vol. 2, p. 195, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) for examples.

<sup>3</sup> Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr b. al-Qayyim, *al-Manār al-Munīf fi-l-Ṣahīḥ wa-l-Ḍa‘īf*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghuddah (Syria: Selbstverlag des Orientalischen Seminars der Universität Bonn, 1961), p. 73. Ibn Taymiyya also discusses many of these traditions, and comments on Dawūd b. al-Muḥabbar, in his *Bughya al-Murtād*, ed. Mūsa b. Sulaymān al-Duwaisī (Medina: Maktaba al-‘Ulūm wa-l-Ḥikam, 2001), pp. 234–7; and also in *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 11, pp. 231–1.

subject, entitled *Kitāb mā'iyya al-'aql wa-l-ikhtilāf al-nās fīhī* ('The Treatise Regarding the Essence of the Intellect and the Differences of the People Regarding it').<sup>1</sup> Although al-Muḥāsibī discusses the role of 'aql in other works of his also,<sup>2</sup> it is in this work that he elaborates and expounds on his views. For al-Muḥāsibī,<sup>3</sup>

“...the human intellect ('aql) is an innate disposition (*gharīza*) that God has placed in most of His servants, but which the servants cannot witness, by means of sight, touch, or taste, in one another, or even in themselves. Rather, God has informed them of this [intellect] by a realization from Him.”

Some later Ḥanbalī works ascribe similar definitions to Ibn Ḥanbal as well.<sup>4</sup> It is unclear whether these are actually statements from Ibn Ḥanbal, or later ascribed to him by his followers.

Another early Sunnī author, and a contemporary of al-Muḥāsibī, was the prolific Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 280/892).<sup>5</sup> Amongst the numerous tracts that he wrote was one entitled *Kitāb al-'aql wa-fadlihī* ("The Treatise on the Human Intellect and Its

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<sup>1</sup> There is only one printed edition of the work, edited by Ḥusayn al-Quwatlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kindī, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> See for example *al-Qasd wa al-Rujū' ila-llāh*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā' (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1980), pp. 58-9; *al-Masā'il fi a'māl al-qulūb wa-al-jawāriḥ wa-al-Makāsib wa-al-'aql*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā' (Cairo: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1969), pp. 237-9. In both of these works, his ideas are the same as those presented in the *Kitāb Māhiyyat al-'aql*. In his *al-Waṣāyā*, ed. 'Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad 'Atā' (Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1986), pp. 129-31, however, he does not define 'aql but rather expounds on its blessings. In contrast to his other works on the subject, in this work he mentions a few traditions and statements of the sages, which perhaps were taken from Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā's work (see below).

<sup>3</sup> Ḥārith b. Assad al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb Māhiyyat al-'aql*, ed. by Ḥusayn al-Quwatlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kindī, 1978), p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> The Ḥanbalī al-Qādī Abū Ya'lā, in his *al-'Udda*, vol. 1, p. 76, quotes from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Tamīmī's *Kitāb al-'Aql*, which appears to be a lost work, that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal said, “'Aql is an innate disposition.” As we shall mention in the next section, Ibn Taymiyya would ascribe this definition at times to al-Muḥāsibī, and at times to Ibn Ḥanbal.

<sup>5</sup> For Abū Bakr Ibn Abī al-Dunyā and his ḥadīth oeuvre, the most comprehensive study is Leah Kinberg, *Morality in the Guise of Dreams: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Manām by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā* (d. 280/892) (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

Blessings”).<sup>1</sup> In conformity with Ibn Abī al-Dunyā’s characteristic style, the work consists of narrations from the Prophet and the early scholars, along with his *isnāds* to these narrations. He quotes a total of six ḥadīths, and over one hundred narrations from the Companions of the Prophet. All of these statements mention the blessings of ‘aql and serve to highlight that its existence and perfection in a person is an indication of God’s favor upon His servant. Although Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā does not reference any ḥadīth traditions regarding the nature and quintessence of the ‘aql, sufficient quotes from various sages are provided that demonstrate true ‘aql as that which leads to piety. By way of example, he states “The wise one is the one who received wisdom from Allah and understood His commands, not the one who understood the affairs of this *dunyā*;”<sup>2</sup> and: “The intelligent man is not the one who knows good from evil, but rather the one who knows what is good and follows it and who knows what is evil and abstains from it.”<sup>3</sup>

Being contemporaries, there is a possibility that al-Muḥāsibī and Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā influenced one another in some way;<sup>4</sup> there is, however, no clear evidence that either of the two quoted from the each other’s works directly.

Another interesting figure who wrote on ‘aql is the traditionalist Muḥammad b. Ḥibbān al-Bustī (d. 354/965). His work is entitled *Rawdat al-‘uqalā’ wa-nuzhat al-fudalā’*

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<sup>1</sup> Abū Bakr ‘Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī-l-Dunya, *Kitāb al-‘aql wa-faḍlīhī*, ed. by Sa‘īd b. Basīn Zaghlūl (Lebanon: Mu’assasa al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27, reported as a statement of Waki‘ b. al-Jarrāḥ.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30, reported as a statement of Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah.

<sup>4</sup> Not only do the both of them view ‘aql to be that which guides one to God, in al-Muḥāsibī’s *al-Waṣāyā*, pp. 129-30, all of the traditions and statements quoted about the blessings of ‘aql also appear in Ibn Abī-l-Dunyā’s work. However, since al-Muḥāsibī does not quote any *isnād*, it is possible that they both obtained these traditions from common sources.

(“The Garden of the Intelligent and the Merriment of the Noble”). This work primarily deals with the noble attributes that Ibn Ḥibbān believes a person of intelligence should possess, and offers his attempt at defining what ‘*aql*’ is. He writes: “‘*Aql* is the name given to the knowledge of acting properly and avoiding improper actions ... and it is of two types: that which is imprinted (*matbū’*), and that which is acquired (*masmū’*). So the imprinted is akin to soil, and that which is acquired [from it] is like the seed and water.”<sup>1</sup>

While there is no evidence to justifiably conclude that Ibn Taymiyya quotes either of these three figures explicitly, it appears that this basic line of reasoning (viz., that ‘*aql*’ is a faculty that is demonstrated in man’s moral action) is certainly one that influenced his views; we will proceed to demonstrate this below.

In parallel to this discussion by the theologians and traditionalists, early Ṣūfī authorities offered their reading of ‘*aql*’. Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) held the ‘*aql*, along with the soul (*rūh*) and heart (*qalb*), constitutes the living reality of man. He considered the spiritual self as requiring a discerning heart (*fitna al-qalb*), a perceptive intellect (*fahm al-‘aql*), and an intuitive spirit (*dhihn al-rūh*), all of which – he argued – were pre-existentially given to man.<sup>2</sup> Another early Ṣūfī, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 285/898) considered the ‘*aql*’ to be similar to the *rūh*, positing that God had split the ‘*aql*’ into pieces and divided it exclusively amongst the believers; intelligence – al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī asserted – must lead to piety by way of necessity, and thus only true believers

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad b. Ḥibbān, *Rawdat al-‘Uqalā’ wa Nuzhat al-Fuḍalā’*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Riyad: Dār al-Mughnī, 1998), p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Böwering, Gerhard, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), pp. 247–53, 260.

in God were ‘intelligent’ people.<sup>1</sup> The Ṣūfī master Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 637/1240) believed that rational consideration alone did not lead to correct knowledge, rather such knowledge is a gift from God to His select servants. ‘Aql, according to him, is limited, but it is the start of all rational consideration.<sup>2</sup> Of course, many other Ṣūfīs, such as Abū al-Ḥasan Nūrī (d. 296/908) viewed the ‘aql as being a hindrance on the path to God, interfering as an arrogant obstacle in the path of love.<sup>3</sup>

The early *falāsifa* of Islam were especially vocal in this regard, and each major figure attempted to define the reality of ‘aql. Much of their thought was imported from Greek philosophical ideas (in particular, the notion of *noûs* and *diánoia*). In fact, the earliest of them, al-Kindī (d. 259/873), wrote an entire work on the intellect, his *Risālah fī-l-‘aql* (‘A Treatise on the Intellect’) even before the earliest Sunnī attempt at definition as undertaken by al-Muḥāsibī. (It is, of course, unlikely that al-Muḥāsibī had read or was even aware of al-Kindī’s work). In a similar vein, later *falāsifa*, such as al-Farābī (d. 338/950), Ibn Miskawayh (d. 420/1030), Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 580/1185), Abū-l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. 552/1157), and Ibn Rushd (d. 594/1198) all attempted to formulate their own conceptions of ‘aql that were independent of and at variance with Sunnī thought.<sup>4</sup> Ibn Sīna, the most famous of the *falāsifa*, “...labored sincerely and

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<sup>1</sup> Massignon, Lois, *Essay on the origins of the technical language of Islamic mysticism*, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Adam, Hüdaverdi, “The Place Of Intellect, Contemplation And Unveiling In The Thought Of Ibn Al-‘Arabi,” *Journal of Academic Studies* 6:21 (2004), pp. 149-161.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Encylopedia Iranica*, s.v. ‘aql’ (F. Rahman and W. C. Chittick), vol. 2, p. 195.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief review of the view of the *falāsifa* on ‘aql, see: Joseph Kenny, “The Human Intellect: The Journey of an Idea from Aristotle to Ibn Rushd” *Orita*, Ibadan, vol xxx, no. 1-2, 1998; Tj. de Boer, in his entry on ‘Akl in *EI2*, discusses – almost exclusively – the *falāsifa*’s conception of ‘aql; A. S. Tritton, “Man, nafs, rūh, ‘aql,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 34:3 (1971), pp. 491-5; *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), s.v. ‘aql’, vol. 2, pp. 194-8, some Persian philosophers and poets and their views on ‘aql are

ingeniously to effect a harmony between reason and revelation on ...Neo-Platonic lines.”<sup>1</sup>

The relationship of the celestial spheres with various emanations of the Divine ‘*aql* is, of course, a hallmark of the *falāsifa*.<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya considered it a given that his audience would find such notions antithetical to the teachings of Islam.

Goldziher spends considerable effort in asserting that *Sūfīs* and *Isma‘īlīs* (in particular, the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*) played a vital role in important neo-Platonic and Gnostic notions of the intellect into Islam. He examines the ḥadīth that alleges the first creation as being the intellect, and proposes that this version, because of its clear contradiction to Sunnī orthodoxy, was only accepted by groups favorable to Platonic thought. However, according to Goldziher, the ḥadīth was made more palatable by substituting the ‘intellect’ with ‘pen’; also, another version claimed that the intellect was not the first creation, but rather a creation that God examined and praised.<sup>3</sup>

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mentioned. Also see Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, “Un Traité D’Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī Sur L’Intellect,” *Annales Islamologiques* (xvi), pp. 127-47.

For an *Isma‘īlī* view of ‘*aql*, see Wilfred Madelung, “Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī and the Seven Faculties of the Intellect,” in *Mediaeval Isma‘īlī History and Thought*, ed. Farhat Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 85-91.

<sup>1</sup> Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> This was imported from the neo-Platonic theory of emanation, and subsequently developed by the *falāsifa*. It posited a series of Intelligences, beginning with the First Intelligence, which arises directly from God. This Intelligence leads to the Second, and also to the highest sphere. This process continues, until the Tenth Intelligence is reached, at which point it has weakened so much that it can only produce the sub-lunar world of matter. This intelligence is the Active Intellect, and it is the Prophetic intellect that can spiritually rejoin this Active Intellect because only the prophetic intellect is pure enough to receive the emanation that emanates from the Active Intellect.

See, for example, Mashhad al-Allaf, *The Essential Ideas of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Edwin Mellon Press, 2006), pp. 27-31, pp. 91-93, and pp. 119-121, for a summary and comparison of al-Kindī’s, al-Farābī’s and Ibn Sīnā’s views; and *Encyclopedie Iranica*, s.v. ‘*aql*’ (F. Rahman and W. C. Chittick), vol. 2, p. 195 for a summary of the Ten Intellects.

<sup>3</sup> I. Goldziher, “Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im ḥadīth,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XXII (1909), pp. 320-2. He also discusses the Shī‘ī understanding of this concept; see *ibid.*, pp. 324-6.

Legal jurists of the various Sunnī schools also defined ‘*aql*’, particularly in works on the foundations of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). The famous Ḥanafī jurist al-Sarakhsī (d. 490/1097), wrote “...‘*aql*’ is a light that exists in the heart, with it the heart can see and examine evidences.”<sup>1</sup> In essence, he was stating, ‘*aql*’ is the light that emanates from a lamp: the eye needs this light to see, but the mere existence of the lamp will not necessarily bring about sight unless the eye examines the object. Similarly, the existence of ‘*aql*’ does not necessarily bring about understanding unless the heart fully examines the subject, and God facilitates his understanding. Shāfi‘ī scholars such as al-Juwainī and al-Ghazālī disagreed, pronouncing these definitions to be spurious (*muzayyaf*).<sup>2</sup>

Most Ash‘arī scholars viewed ‘*aql*’ as being a type of ‘necessary knowledge’ (*ilm darūrī*) that was a precondition to ‘acquired knowledge’ (*ilm iktisābī*); this opinion has been ascribed to the eponymous founder of the school, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī.<sup>3</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, one of the earliest Ash‘arīs subscribing to the Mālikī legal school, defined ‘*aql*’ “...as being a type of knowledge, for no one without knowledge can be considered ‘intelligent’. But this knowledge is not acquired, for acquiring knowledge must itself be preceded with the existence of ‘*aql*.’”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Uṣūl al-Sarakhsī*, ed. Abī al-Wafā’ al-Afghānī (Hyderabad: Lajnat Ihyā’ al-Mā‘rif al-Nū‘māniyya, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 346-7. Also see: Fakhr al-Islām al-Bazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Bazdawī*, ed. Muḥammad al-Mu’tashim al-Baghdādī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1994), vol. 2, p. 731.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Juwainī, *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, p. 112; al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfa*, vol. 1, p. 23. Of course, there is an overlap between these ‘Shāfi‘ī’ scholars and their ‘Ash‘arī’ theologies, as the first chapter demonstrated, and it is perhaps impossible to completely separate these two spheres. However, perhaps one can take comfort in ascribing them to their legal schools in their legal writings, and their theological school in their theological writings.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Zarkashī, Muḥammad b. Bahādur, *al-Bahr al-Muhiṭ* (Kuwait: Ministry of Islamic Affairs, 1992), vol. 1, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Juwainī, *al-Burhān fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. Abd al-‘Adhīm al-Dīb (Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1980.) vol. 1, p. 111.

Al-Ghazālī, in very similar terms, claimed that ‘*aql* “... is an attribute (‘*ṣifa*) through which one who possesses it is able to comprehend knowledge and examine intellectual evidences.”<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, al-Ghazālī quote’s Ibn Sīna’s eleven definitions of ‘*aql*, three of which are definitions that ‘common people’ (the “*awwām*”) understand from this term, and seven of which are specific to the *falāsifa*.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the Ḥanbalī Ibn ‘Aqīl agreed with this basic premise claiming that ‘*aql* “...is a type of inherent knowledge” (*ḍarb min al-‘ulūm al-ḍarūriyya*).<sup>3</sup>

It is clear from what has preceded that no unanimous definition of ‘*aql* was arrived at in the attempts of the early Islamic scholars. Moreover even scholars from within same theological, legal or philosophical school often disagreed amongst each other regarding ‘*aql*. In terms of Ibn Taymiyya, however, it seems fair to conclude that al-Muḥāsibī in particular, and perhaps even Ibn Ḥibbān and Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, had some lasting influence on him.

#### 2.1.2 Ibn Taymiyya’s conception of ‘*aql*

Ibn Taymiyya’s understandings regarding the human intellect can be gleaned from his many writings. While he wrote a small treatise that seems dedicated to the

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *al-Mankhūl min ta’līqāt al-uṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad Husayn Hītū (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1980), p. 45. His teacher al-Juwainī also has similar definitions. See his *al-Burhān*, vol. 1, pp. 95-96.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Mī’yār al-‘ilm fi-l-manṭiq* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1990), pp. 175-9, where he explains these eleven definitions.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Qādī Abū Ya‘lā, *al-Udda fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Mubārakī (Riyāḍ: n.p., 1990), vol. 1, p. 83.

discussion of ‘*aql*,<sup>1</sup> the majority of his discussion on this may be found scattered throughout the *Dar*’ and some of his other works.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya points out that the word ‘*aql* – in its commonly used form – does not occur in the Qur’ān, and even its solitary usage in ḥadīth is incidental. Regardless, it is clear from both the Qur’ānic and the ḥadīth texts that ‘*aql* is something praiseworthy, its absence or deficiency being considered blameworthy.<sup>3</sup>

The definition posited by the *falāsifa*, and their attempts to link the ‘*aql* to celestial objects, is – as discussed earlier – one that is dismissed without question by Ibn Taymiyya who pronounces it a travesty against language, Scripture, and against all believers.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Ibn Taymiyya categorically denies the Aristotelian notion of ‘intellect’ any legitimacy or relevance to ‘*aql* in the language of the Muslims.<sup>5</sup>

In his small treatise on the subject, Ibn Taymiyya was asked to define what ‘*aql* is, and expound on its nature: whether it was an ‘accident’ or a ‘substance’, and where it resided. Ibn Taymiyya’s response was that “...‘*aql* is something (*amr*) that resides in the one of intelligence – it may be called an accident or a characteristic, but it is not a body

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<sup>1</sup> This treatise is commonly called *Mas’ala fī-l-‘aql wa-l-nafs*. It is found in *Majmū’ al-fatāwa*, vol. 9, pp. 271-305. Although the title appears to suggest that it discusses the human intellect at length, in reality it is more of a discussion of the soul, and the intellect is only discussed briefly.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, his *Bughya al-Murtād*, and his *Muswadda*.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 248. The only tradition that he can find in which the term ‘*aql*’ is used is the popular tradition in which the Prophet encourages women to give more in charity, and refers to them as ‘...deficient in ‘*aql* and religion.’ Interestingly, even though the ḥadīth has – as a general rule in classical Islamic scholarship – been understood misogynistically, as implying that women are not as intelligent as men, Ibn Taymiyya understands the tradition in a different light, claiming that the meaning of ‘*aql*’ here is ‘memory’, thus giving the ‘reading’ that women are *not as able as men* to retain what they have memorized. *Ibid*, pp. 248-50. Also see: *Majmū’ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 9, pp. 231-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya al-Murtād*, pp. 237-243, and p. 251.

<sup>5</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 9, p. 231.

that subsists in and of itself.”<sup>1</sup> In another work, he writes that, “...for those who dabble in the concepts of ‘accidents’ and ‘substances’, it is clearly an accident and not a substance.”<sup>2</sup>

On more than one occasion Ibn Taymiyya quotes al-Muḥāsibī’s conception of the intellect as constituting ‘an innate disposition’ (*gharīza*), thereby indicating his approval of this description.<sup>3</sup> However, at times, Ibn Taymiyya ascribes this same statement to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.<sup>4</sup> He qualifies what he means by ‘innate disposition’ (*gharīza*) by quoting another authority: “...meaning that God created it from the very beginning, and it is not acquired.”<sup>5</sup>

However, Ibn Taymiyya also believed that this innate disposition was only a part of what man calls ‘intellect’. Another equally important aspect of ‘*aql*’ was one’s experiences, observations and reflections that stem forth from this innate disposition.<sup>6</sup> In other words, ‘*aql*’ seems to have an inherent, in born capacity, and an acquired, learned, capacity.

In his work entitled *Bughya al-murtād* (‘The Goal of the Seeker’), Ibn Taymiyya discussed the various definitions that the *falāsifa* and *mutakallimūn* offered for ‘*aql*’, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Mas’ala fī al-‘aql wa-l-nafs*, in *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 9, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 252. Also see: *DT*, vol. 1, p. 222.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū‘ Fatāwā* v. 9, p. 287. Also see: *ibid.*, vol 9, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 257. He quotes this position from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Tamīmī’s *Kitāb al-‘Aql*, which appears to be a lost work. In another place in this work, he ascribes this position to both al-Muḥāsibī and Ibn Ḥanbal. See: *ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>5</sup> *Al-Muswadda*, p. 556.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 89.

then concluded by pointing out that the term ‘*aql*’ can be applied to four different concepts, all of which, put together, are a direct or indirect reference to it.<sup>1</sup>

- (i) In the first, the word ‘*aql*’ may be applied to a ‘necessary knowledge’ (*‘ulūm darūriyya*), the presence of which classifies people as sane and causes the legal laws of the *Shari‘a* to be applicable to them (*i.e.*, *taklīf al-mukallaf*).
- (ii) In the second, the word is applied to acquired knowledge (*‘ulūm muktasaba*) that should better a person and cause him to do that which benefits him and abstain from that which harms him. This usage is also Qur‘ānic (as an example, he quotes Q. 67:10).
- (iii) In the third, the word may be used to indicate acting upon what one knows, and in fact this is the gist of ‘praiseworthy intelligence’ (*aql mahmūd*).
- (iv) And in the final meaning, ‘*aql*’ is the innate faculty (*gharīza*) that one uses to think and reflect.

Ibn Taymiyya held that the intellect varies from person to person, and that it is possible that one person’s intellect can be more than another’s.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, commenting on the controversy of the location of the intellect, whether it resides in the chest or the brain, Ibn Taymiyya favors the opinion that the locus of the intellect is the chest, but that its light rises up to the brain and from there reaches the other senses.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 260. Also see the *Muswadda*, pp. 558-9, where Ibn Taymiyya quotes his father as having a similar opinion.

<sup>2</sup> *Al-Muswadda*, p. 560.

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Muswadda*, p. 559; *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 10, pp. 721-2. This controversy is a result of certain Qur‘ānic passages that seem to ascribe the faculty of intellect to the heart, such as Q. 22:46.

## 2.2 Ibn Taymiyya's Conception of 'naql'

The usage of the term 'naql' is easier to identify in Ibn Taymiyya's writings. Ibn Taymiyya explicitly defines *naql* as "all that has been transmitted from the Prophet," which encompasses both the Qur'ān and the Sunna.<sup>1</sup> Innumerable times throughout the *Dar'*, Ibn Taymiyya pairs together '...the Qur'ān and the Sunna,' sometimes via the phrase '...everything the Prophet came with.'<sup>2</sup>

For Ibn Taymiyya, the Qur'ān and Sunna contained each and every matter and ruling that was needed by mankind.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, while of course completely submitting to the legal authority of the ḥadīth, he did not view it as being equivalent to the Qur'ān as an evidence. This is demonstrated in his claim that the Sunna is not capable of abrogating the Qur'ān, for this would imply that the Sunna is equivalent to or better than it. For Ibn Taymiyya, only the Qur'ān can abrogate the Qur'ān.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most fundamental differences between Ibn Taymiyya and his interlocutors was the fact that, for Ibn Taymiyya, the texts of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth can and are definitively understood, to the level of full certainty (*yaqīn*).<sup>5</sup> Unlike his *mutakallimūn* counterparts, who required up to a dozen conditions to claim that a

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<sup>1</sup> For example *DT*, vol. 1, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> For example, *DT*, vol. 1, p. 203, and *DT*, vol. 5, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatawā*, vol. 31, p. 338.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Majmū' al-Fatawā*, vol. 20, p. 398; vol. 17, pp. 195-7.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 73, and vol. 1, pp. 195-6.

certain text actually gave a definitive meaning,<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya believed that God spoke in a clear, explicit language so that there may not be ambiguity in His speech.<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that God Himself describes His Book as being one of guidance, and a light to mankind<sup>3</sup> – to presume otherwise is to do exactly what the Jews and Christians did with their Scriptures, namely, rejecting, reinterpreting and concealing God’s Speech.<sup>4</sup> In fact, to claim, as the *falāsifa* did, that the Qur’ān is a Book full of symbolic speech, or as the *mutakallimūn* did, that it needs to be reinterpreted since it does not conform to correct reason, is to impugn God and His speech as being deceitful and untrue.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to ‘all that the Prophet came with’ (*viz., naql*), Ibn Taymiyya strongly advocated uncritical adherence to the teachings and practices of the earliest generations of traditionalist scholars (the ‘*salaf*’). “The ultimate cause of the people of deviation feeling the need to resort to such a twisted rendering [of the Texts],” he writes, “...is that they turned away from what the Book of God says and rejected the understanding of the Book of God as the Companions and Successors understood it, preferring instead what opposes it.”<sup>6</sup> He roundly criticizes all those who have “... strayed away from the path, that of following the earlier generations, the Prophetic,

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One, Section 3.3, for examples of conditions that Ash‘arī theologians placed on any religious text before it can be deemed conclusive.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 278.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 211-3.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, pp. 370-4.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, p. 383.

and Divinely-ordained, path (*al-ṭarīq al-salafiyya al-nabawiyya al-shar‘iyya al-ilāhiyya*).<sup>1</sup> In fact, a signpost for deviation, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is the claim that the early generations were not as knowledgeable as subsequent ones.<sup>2</sup> While – strictly speaking – the understanding of the early Muslims is not actually part of *al-naql*, Ibn Taymiyya views their opinions as being essential in its understanding.

Like all Sunnī jurists, Ibn Taymiyya affirmed the validity of unanimous consensus, or *ijmā'*, as an infallible source of theology and law.<sup>3</sup> This was on a theoretical level. On a practical level, he claimed that there could never be a true *ijmā'* except when a Scriptural evidence existed. Additionally, he believed that it was only possible to verify *ijmā'* during the era of the Companions: any claim for *ijmā'* after this era, according to Ibn Taymiyya, could not be proven, since the number of jurists and their dispersion through Muslim lands made such a verification impossible.<sup>4</sup> Such stringent conditions were probably placed due to the frequent invocation of *ijmā'* by his opponents in order to prove their theological claims. By circumscribing the role of this concept, yet still theoretically affirming it, he managed to remain within Sunnī limits of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, yet still effectively strip away the notion to be a mere theoretical reality, devoid of any practical ramifications. It is, therefore, not surprising that Ibn Taymiyya himself has been frequently accused of contravening *ijmā'* on many issues.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, p. 374.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 20, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 29, p. 195-6, p. 200, p. 298; al-Matroudi, *The Hanbali School of Law and Ibn Taymiyyah*, pp. 57-9.

<sup>5</sup> See K. El-Rouayheb, “From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī to Khayr al-Dīn al-Ālūsī: Changing views of Ibn Taymiyya amongst non-Hanbali Sunnī scholars,” p. 288.

Ibn Taymiyya makes no attempt to equivocate when he states that the religion of the Muslims should be built upon submission to the Book of God, the Sunna of His Messenger, and the unanimous consensus of the Ummah (*ijmā'*), for these are the only three matters that are free from error. Any differences of opinion must be referred back to the Divine Book and Sunna, and be in accordance with the understanding of the righteous predecessors.<sup>1</sup>

God's path was clear for him: it was to be found in following the Divine Texts as understood and implemented by Islam's earliest orthodox generations, in particular the Prophet's Companions and the scholars of the next generation.

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 272.

### *3. Deriving Ibn Taymiyya's Equivalent of the Qānūn*

#### *3.1 Ibn Taymiyya's Views on the Relationship Between 'aql and naql*

Ibn Taymiyya has long been stereotyped as a fundamentalist-literalist who denies any import to man's intellectual faculties. Some have even called him 'anti-rationalist'.<sup>1</sup> However, if anything, this hackneyed stereotype is indicative of a general lack of understanding regarding Ibn Taymiyya as a scholar, the profundity of writings, and the theology that he developed.

Far from denying the worth of the intellect, Ibn Taymiyya upholds that there are two ultimate sources of knowledge: Scripture and reason, and even considers both to be independently authoritative.<sup>2</sup> In fact, he supports this by underlining that no less an authority than God frequently employs rational arguments, appealing to man's reason in order to support the truth. Ibn Taymiyya argues that God's appeal to reason is in fact a demonstrative proof of the legitimacy of rational arguments. Moreover, if one contrasts the Qur'ānic rational arguments with the arguments of the *mutakallimūn*, an examiner would conclude that the former are methodically more sound and rational than the latter, and the analogies that God utilizes are far superior to those employed by the *mutakallimūn*. As an example, he asks his readers to consider God's rational

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of such stereotypes, see: I. Goldziher, *Introduction of Islamic Theology and Law*, pp. 240-1 Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 334, 359; T. Winter's Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, p. 10; H. Ziai, "Recent Trends in Arabic and Persian Philosophy," in P. Adamson and R. Taylor (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, p. 414. The 'anti-rationalist' appellation is from Ziai's article.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 19.

arguments to prove the reality of the Day of Judgment.<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya claims that it is not rationality *qua* rationality that is worthy of criticism, quite the contrary, it is instead what the *mutakallimūn* consider ‘rationality’ and call ‘intellectual proofs’ that he objects to. Ibn Taymiyya illustrates that the rational proofs the Qur’ān employs yield definitive knowledge, in contrast to the rational proofs of the *mutakallimūn*.<sup>2</sup>

He also acknowledges that the scope of subjects that the intellect is capable of tackling is far broader than the subjects that Scripture discusses and agrees that the natural sciences, the like of mathematics, the laws of physics, etc., are fully within the purview of human reason, and thus Scripture is not intended to play a significant role in these sciences.<sup>3</sup>

For Ibn Taymiyya, the ‘People of Truth’ (viz. *Ahl al-Sunna*) do not impugn rational evidences *per se*, nor what the mind derives as being valid.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the mind informs one of many matters, and there are clearly matters that are self-evident (*badihi*) to every rational person.<sup>5</sup> In fact he argues that what is known from the obvious rational intellect is even more clear than knowledge that can only be derived from textual sources or unanimous consensus.<sup>6</sup>

Rational arguments are in fact one of three essential ways to arrive at certain knowledge, the other two being one’s senses (*al-hiss*) and factual statements (*al-khabar*

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 149-50.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 194.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 151.

*al-sādiq).*<sup>1</sup> Far from sidelining our intellect, the Law-Giver commands us to employ it and derive benefit from it. It is for this reason that many of the Divine evidences are simultaneously Scriptural and intellectual.<sup>2</sup>

In one passage, Ibn Taymiyya writes:<sup>3</sup>

Sound intellect (*al-‘aql al-salīm*) is a necessary precondition in order to understand any of the sciences, and a sign of perfection, and a cause of wise actions. It is through intellect that one’s knowledge and deeds are perfected. But intellect is not independent of either knowledge or action. Rather, it is an innate faculty (*gharīza*) of the soul, and a power within it, similar to the power of sight in the eyes. So, when the light of faith and of the Qur’ān shines upon it, it is just as if the light of the sun shines upon the eye. However, if intellect is by itself it cannot see those matters that it is not capable of seeing. And if it is removed in totality, then all statements and actions become bestial in nature. Therefore, any state that is achieved in the absence of intellect is deficient, and any statements that contradict intellect are false. The prophets come with that which the intellect cannot itself uncover, not that which the intellect finds impossible. Those who go to excesses in the role of the intellect decreed certain matters to be necessary, others to be probable, and others to be impossible; all based on arguments that they deemed rational, but that were, in fact, false. Based on this, they refuted the message of the prophets.

Ibn Taymiyya is also willing to accept that the *falāsifa* and people of *kalām* have intelligence that sets them apart from other people,<sup>1</sup> and that many of the syllogisms of

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 178–9. Also see V. Lamotte, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theory of Knowledge* (unpublished dissertation, submitted to Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University; 1994), p. 64. Ibn Taymiyya also believes that human intuition, or the *fitrā* plays a vital epistemological role. This will be discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 198–200.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 3, p. 339. These quotes appear to have been extracted from the Ḥanafi jurist al-Sarakhsī’s analogy, previously quoted.

logic (*manṭiq*), and the categorizations proposed by the logicians, have truth in them.<sup>2</sup>

What he condemns, however, is that the practitioners of the *Qānūn* rely on the ‘*aql* to the complete exclusion of *naql*.<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to say that his opponents – despite being blessed with superior intelligence, and despite their grasp of certain intellectual sciences that do contain some elements of truth – do not correctly comprehend the role and scope of human intellect, wishing to extend its latitude in a manner that is not possible for it. In order to do so, they necessarily exaggerate their own importance, couching all of this in inaccessible terminology so as to obfuscate their conclusions to the masses, and that their errors may not be noted. They do this, Ibn Taymiyya explains, by intentionally using ambiguous words and unclear concepts in their writings, and then intimidating the initiate who might possibly be disposed to challenge their understanding by reminding him that he is not yet intelligent nor capable enough for mastery of such a discipline! The young student, faced with what appears to be a superior group of scholars, using obscure terminologies, is therefore forced to submit and accept their sophistry, failing to challenge it outright.<sup>4</sup>

In what appears to be an *avant garde* embrace of the *falāsifa* over the Ash‘arīs, he even goes so far as to claim that there are only two logical possibilities: the *Ahl al-Hadīth* school, which takes the entire corpus of Scripture at face value, or the philosophers who did the exact opposite, and assumed everything to be allegorical. Ibn Taymiyya

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwa*, vol 3, p. 338-9.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 295-6.

sees that the methodology of the *mutakallimūn* makes no logical sense, as they take some portions of the Scripture at face value and others as metaphorical.<sup>1</sup> This either-or polarization seemed, for Ibn Taymiyya, the only consistent course of option.

Another issue that Ibn Taymiyya points out is that the best intellect must be found in the prophets of God. The prophets of God, he writes, are the most intelligent of mankind by the consensus of both believers and disbelievers. This – he clarifies – is because believers will by definition consider the prophets to be the most rational and intelligent of men, and even those who opposed them concede that they were the most effective and knowledgeable in attaining their goals.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, asks Ibn Taymiyya, how can one prefer the ‘*aql* of the ancient Greeks, or of the *falāsifa* who followed them, over the ‘*aql* of the prophets, who were the most intelligent of mankind?<sup>3</sup>

In refuting the *Qanūn* Ibn Taymiyya realizes and in fact explicitly concedes to the fact that he must employ rational and Scriptural proofs to support his points:<sup>4</sup>

And we are elucidating the falsity of this method (viz. the *Qānūn*), sometimes through faith-based proofs and Qur’ānic arguments, and sometimes through rational arguments that can be understood by those who do not take the Qur’ān or faith-based arguments as evidence. And we have – through God’s grace – clarified in a manner that cannot be refuted, the fallacy of the arguments that are commonly used by the philosophers and the *Jahmīs*, and we know from true intellect the error of what they rely on.

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> He is hinting at – but not stating – the blasphemous alternative, which would also grant the prophets extremely high intelligence: if the prophets are liars, the mere fact that they managed to convince so many people of their claims, and acquire such devotion from the masses, demonstrates their intelligence.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, p. 258.

This being said, it is also clear that Ibn Taymiyya is unwilling to entertain even the slightest possibility of any Qur'ānic verse or authentic Prophetic tradition as being considered in contradiction to any rationally derived conclusion. Indeed, he states,

So, in summary, texts that are affirmed in the Book or in the Sunna can never be contradicted by any rational thought... Rather, we shall say, in a comprehensive and general way, that anything that has been affirmed as having originated from the Prophet can never be in contradiction with clear intellect, much less [the intellect] be given precedence over it!<sup>1</sup>

Thus, if anything contradicts the explicit texts of the Qur'ān or Sunna, then by virtue of this contradiction, the text cannot be considered rationally sound. Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya is very clear on the fact that any attempt to reconcile a non-revealed source with the explicit text of Qur'ān is indicative of weakness or lack of faith.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, Ibn Taymiyya is not calling for an uncritical acceptance of Scripture either. He references the Companions as frequently questioning the Prophet regarding what they considered ‘problematic texts’, they even tried to reconcile an apparent contradiction within the text. But in all of these instances they were trying to arrive at a correct understanding of the text in question, based on other established texts. There was no sense of absolute rejection, much less that of privileging their desires or rational inclinations over it.<sup>3</sup>

The above evidences that Ibn Taymiyya is not, contrary to common misconception, an uncritical-literalist. Rather, he allows for the necessity of occasional

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 155-6.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 5, pp. 227-231. He gives at least half a dozen examples of this phenomenon.

reinterpretation of the Texts. There is, of course, no question that he values the supremacy of Scripture. However, he does so recognizing that the ‘literal’ meanings of a Text are sometimes not the intended ones. His caveat is that, in order to be acceptable, any such *ta’wil* be one that the speaker intended for his audience to make, and not one that the audience makes based on external factors.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that fundamentally Ibn Taymiyya and his opponents are on the same ground: neither is willing to concede an actual clash between Scripture and reason, and both sides attempt to work out a congruous relationship. However, the question for both sides remains: to what should precedence be given? Should the literal texts of Scripture be held in supremacy, or should conclusions derived from reason be considered supreme? It is in answering this question that Ibn Taymiyya and his opponents fundamentally disagree. Al-Rāzī in particular, and the Ash‘arī school in general (which for Ibn Taymiyya constituted the primary school that challenged his vision of orthodox Islam), gave primacy to reason, and allowed what they viewed as rational evidences to re-interpret Scripture. Ibn Taymiyya, on the other hand, was not willing to concede that the apparent meaning of Scripture could possibly be incorrect, and thus his ‘offensive’ against al-Rāzī’s *Qānūn* was undertaken on rational and religious grounds.

Ibn Taymiyya’s vision of ‘*aql*’ and its role is that of assigning it the status of a non-interfering receptacle of the Qur’ān (which for Ibn Taymiyya is of course a Divine Attribute – being God’s *kalām*). The Qur’ān is self-evidently true, and any pure soul (*viz.*, on the uncorrupted *fitra*) possessing rational intellect will recognize it as such. Ultimate

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 201. Also see: J. Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, pp. 54-55.

truth is a Divine-gift, not something that is humanly-derived; yet derived-knowledge, as long as it does not conflict with Divinely Revealed knowledge, is a worthy and praiseworthy endeavor. Additionally, it is indeed possible for derived-knowledge to attain truth, however since there is no internal mechanism allowing man to judge truth *qua* truth, one must by necessity resort to supra-human knowledge, which is, of course, knowledge revealed from the Divine.<sup>1</sup>

From all that has preceded, it is clear, as Hoover writes, that Ibn Taymiyya, far from being an uncritical-follower of Scripture, "...is more fundamentally an apologist for the rationality of the tradition ... than a polemicist against alleged theological innovations, which, of course, he also is."<sup>2</sup>

### ***3.2 A Proposed Taymiyyan Version of the ‘Universal Law’***

Following our outline of Ibn Taymiyya’s conception of ‘*aql*’ and ‘*naql*’, it is now appropriate to conclude with an attempt at positing a ‘Taymiyyan’ equivalent to al-Rāzī’s *Qānūn*.

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<sup>1</sup> There is clearly a circularity in Ibn Taymiyya’s argument – one that he does not point out but simply assumes his reader will not only acknowledge, but agree with as being rational. That circularity is: true reason will always be in conformity with explicit Scripture, yet it is explicit Scripture that will decide what is in fact correct true reason. As we shall see in the next chapter, this ‘circularity’ will be made even more complex when the notion of the *fīṭra* is added to this mix.

<sup>2</sup> Hoover, Jon, “God Acts by His Will and Power: Ibn Taymiyya’s Theology of a Personal God in his Treatise on the Voluntary Attributes” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Yossef Rapaport and Shahab Ahmed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 56. Hoover concludes this article by saying, “In this light, what we find ... is further evidence for regarding Ibn Taymiyya as an apologist for the coherence and rationality of the theological data found in the tradition.” *Ibid.*, p. 74.

It is a rather glaring omission in a work of this nature that Ibn Taymiyya does not derive his own equivalent of the *Qānūn*. There are, however, some attempts at this, for example, in his sixth point, he refutes al-Rāzī's *Qānūn* by offering a counter one:<sup>1</sup>

It may be said: If the *Shari'a* and intellect conflict with one another, precedence must be given to the *Shari'a*, since it is the intellect that has confirmed the veracity of all that the *Shari'a* has come with, whereas the *Shari'a* has not done the same for the intellect.

Though it would be tempting to take this as Ibn Taymiyya's version of the *Qānūn*,<sup>2</sup> it would not be accurate to do so, since it would assume that what he said by way of argumentation would be wholly valid outside of its context. This 'attempt' at a 'Taymiyyan' *Qānūn* also appears to neglect many other points of the *Dar'*. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya himself alludes to the fact that this structure of a *Qānūn* is not without its faults, for he writes, after formulating it, "...and it is well-known that, if this were said, it would make more sense than what they say."<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya's skeptical opponents could theorize that he did not propose an alternative to the *Qānūn* because he realized that it was an impossible endeavor. After all, such a cynic could claim, Ibn Taymiyya's polemical methods, his harsh and uncompromising criticisms of every group that opposed him, and his convoluted web

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> He also derives a similar Law in the tenth point, but his reasoning differs. While the reasoning in the sixth point is that the intellect has affirmed the *Shari'a*, not vice versa, in the tenth point, he states that it would be inconsistent to reject the Scripture because a rejection of the Scripture would *ipso facto* be a rejection of the same intellect that considered it to be valid, and hence would impugn the authority of the very source (i.e., the intellect) from which the contradiction derives. However, Ibn Taymiyya reasons, an affirmation of the Scripture does not inherently impugn the authority of intellect as a whole. See: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 170-1.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 138.

of refuting and counter-refuting ineluctably leads to little more than a mass of criticism lacking methodological substance. Nonetheless, such a view, while certainly valid from one perspective, fails to take into account Ibn Taymiyya's own paradigmatic views of the relationship between '*aql*' and '*naql*', and his goal in writing the work.

A possible formulation, taking into account previous discussions regarding Ibn Taymiyya's conception of '*aql*' and '*naql*', may be:

*A categorical conflict between Revelation (*naql*) and reason ('*aql*) is not possible, since both are from God: one His Speech through which He guided man, and the other His gift by which He preferred him over other creatures. If, however, an explicit and definitive text from the Qur'ān or authentic ḥadīth (al-*naql* al-ṣahīḥ) is perceived to be at odds with a particular individual's rationally-derived conclusion, then both Revelation and sound reason demand that this rationally-derived conclusion be rejected because it must be fallacious. And if an indubitable rational proof (al-'*aql* al-ṣarīḥ) is found to be at odds with an interpretation of Scripture, while the Scripture allows for legitimate alternative interpretations, in accordance with the understanding of the pious predecessors and the agreed upon principles of the Arabic language, the Scripture may be interpreted so as to be compatible with this rational proof. And if both Scripture and reason posit opinions that are perceived to be mutually exclusive, neither of them being indubitable, a final religious verdict shall be suspended until an indubitable evidence, either rational or Scriptural, is introduced that resolves this contradiction.*

## CHAPTER THREE

The *Fitrā* - Ibn Taymiyya's  
Alternative to the Cosmological Proof  
for God's Existence

Ibn Taymiyya identifies the fundamental proof from which the *Qānūn* stems as being the Ash‘arī proof for the existence of God. Not only does he vehemently denounce the premises and syllogisms for this proof (the discussion of which will occupy the first part of this chapter), he also proceeds to offer a unique and powerful alternative: the notion of *fitra*. This final chapter will examine this constant and recurring theme of the *Dar’*. After a brief overview of the *kalām* cosmological argument for the existence of God, the second part of this chapter will be a discussion of the precise role and function that Ibn Taymiyya posited for the *fitra*, along with its relationship with the intellect (*‘aql*). The final section will outline key theological differences that are generated from Ibn Taymiyya’s views *vis-à-vis* al-Rāzī’s; these will be demonstrated via a close study and critical comparison of the Qur’ānic account of Abraham’s search for the Divine via celestial objects. This contrast will vividly illustrate what is at stake for both of these theologians.

# 1. Ibn Taymiyya's Critique of the Proof for God's Existence

## 1.1 The Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God

The *kalām* cosmological arguments for the existence for God have been researched extensively by numerous scholars; only a brief summary is offered here in order to contextualize Ibn Taymiyya's critique.<sup>1</sup>

The preliminary foundations for this proof are almost always attributed to the writings of Plato,<sup>2</sup> but it was Aristotle who first posited the notion of an ‘Unmoved Mover’ who must, by necessity, exist, and who cannot be subject to any motion (by which he meant an accident). This ‘Unmoved Mover’ was also termed the ‘First Cause’ (and sometimes, ‘God’).<sup>3</sup> These ideas were further developed by John Philoponus (d. ~580 CE),<sup>4</sup> and were most likely introduced to the Muslim world, via the proto-*mutakallimūn*, through the writings of John of Damascus (d. 749 CE).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most thorough discussion of this topic remains: Davidson, Herbert, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 86–154. Other useful monographs include: Al-Alousi, Husam Muhi Eldin, *The Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought* (Baghdad: National Printing and Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 158–321; and Craig, William L., *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (University of Birmingham Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Plato discussed the concept of motion that generates other motions, and states that the entire sequence of motion must originate from a being that self-generates motion. See his *Laws*, ‘Chapter X’ in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 1551–2.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle discusses these concepts at length in two places. Firstly, in his *Physics*, Books 8.1 and 8.6, and secondly, in his *Metaphysics*, Books 12.1 and 12.2. See: *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001). For an overview of Aristotle’s arguments, see: Ackrill, J. L., “Change and Aristotle’s theological argument,” in *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 131–41.

<sup>4</sup> Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, pp. 86–95; Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument*, p. 8; Iskenderoglu, Muammer, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 23–9.

<sup>5</sup> I have alluded to the possible influence of John of Damascus in the formation of *kalām* in my first chapter. In particular, his proofs for proving God’s existence bear striking similarities to the later arguments of the *mutakallimūn*. He writes, in his *The Orthodox Faith*, in *The Fathers of the Church: St. John of Damascus, Writings*, tr. Frederic H. Chase Jr. (The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), pp. 168–9:

The *mutakallimūn* took these somewhat rudimentary notions and devised a more thorough proof for the existence of God. Most authorities ascribe this proof to Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 226 A.H./841 C.E.);<sup>1</sup> however, Ibn Taymiyya held Jahm b. Ṣafwān to be the first who introduced this proof, in its most rudimentary elements, to the Muslim intellectual world.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of who the first proponent of this theory was, the *dalīl al-a‘rād wa-hudūth al-ajsām* (commonly translated as ‘the Proof for God’s Existence from the Createdness of Accidents’; henceforth the *dalīl*) was to become a standard proof for the createdness of the world, and hence the existence of a Creator, for the Mu‘tazilīs, Ash‘arīs and Maturīdīs (with significant differences amongst them regarding the nature of an ‘accident’ and the various premises associated with this proof).

The Mu‘tazilī Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415 /1024) succinctly articulates the various premises of this *dalīl*. He claims, firstly, one must acknowledge that there are, within bodies, certain ‘qualities’ (*ma‘āni*) such as movement and rest. Secondly, that these

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All things that exist, are either created or uncreated. If, then, things are created, it follows that they are also wholly mutable. For things, whose existence originated in change, must also be subject to change, whether it be that they perish or that they become other than they are by act of wills. But if things are uncreated they must in all consistency be also wholly immutable.... Things then that are mutable are also wholly created. But things that are created must be the work of some maker, and the maker cannot have been created. For if he had been created, he also must surely have been created by some one, and so on till we arrive at something uncreated. The Creator, then, being uncreated, is also wholly immutable. And what could this be other than Deity?

In this paragraph, the basic outline of the ‘Proof for the Existence of God from the Createdness of Accidents’ is given, as is the premise that God can never be characterized with an ‘accident’. The role of John of Damascus in the formation of early *kalām* remains a necessary area of research - one I intend to return to in a future paper.

Also see: Ajhar, Abdel Hakeem, *The Metaphysics of the Idea of God in Ibn Taymiyya’s Thought* (Montreal: Unpublished dissertation, McGill’s Institute of Islamic Studies, 2000), pp. 90-96.

<sup>1</sup> Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Ahmād, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān (Cairo: Maktabata Wahbah, 1996), p. 94. Davidson also considers al-‘Allāf to be the main progenitor of this evidence; see *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God*, p. 134.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, vol. 1, p. 310. Also see my discussion of this point in my MA thesis: Y. Qadhi, *Jahm b. Ṣafwān*, vol. 1, pp. 311-317. I shall return to this point in the next section (Section 1.2.2 of this Chapter), and will point out that this claim does not seem to be grounded in academic merit.

qualities are created. Thirdly, that bodies are concomitant with these qualities, and not preceding them. And lastly, that if bodies are not free of created qualities and do not precede them, then the bodies themselves must be created.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the Ash‘arīs, this *dalīl* was mentioned in a rudimentary form by both al-Ash‘arī himself<sup>2</sup> and al-Bayhaqī.<sup>3</sup> However, it was al-Bāqillānī who first expounded on it and make it a fundamental principle (*asl*) for the school.<sup>4</sup> A few decades later, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī proclaimed that this *dalīl* was the second fundamental (*asl*) out of the fifteen fundamentals (*uṣūl*) of the religion, hence “...every opinion that conflicts with the *dalīl* that proves bodies and accidents are created must be rejected.”<sup>5</sup> Both al-Juwainī and al-Ghazālī after him, while adhering to the basic outline of the *kalām* proofs, introduced Avicennian proofs for the existence of God as well.<sup>6</sup>

These developments preceding Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī allowed him to filter out four, and in some works five, separate proofs for the existence of God.<sup>7</sup> Like all Ash‘arīs, al-Rāzī began with the premise that knowledge of God is not ingrained, but rather must be

<sup>1</sup> See: *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan Alī b. Ismā‘il al-Ash‘arī, *Kitāb al-luma‘ fī al-radd ‘alā ahl al-zaygh wa al-bida‘*, ed. Ḥammūda Ghurāba (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Azhariyya li al-Turāth, n.d.), p. 76. However, in another work of his, he severely criticised this *dalīl* and called it a product of the ‘philosophers and people of deviation’; see: *Risālah ilā Ahl al-Thagr*, ed. Muḥammad al-Julaynid (Riyad: Dār al-Liwā’, 1990), pp. 52-55. Ibn Taymiyya, as shall be discussed in the next section, jumped on this point and claimed that al-Ash‘arī ‘repented’ from using this *dalīl*.

<sup>3</sup> Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-I‘tiqād wa al-hidāyah ilā sabīl ar-rashād*, ed. Aḥmad Abū al-‘Aynayn (Riyad: Dār al-Faḍīlat, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Abū Bakr b. al-Tayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, ed. ‘Imād al-Dīn Ḥaydar (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1994), pp. 37-43. For a brief overview of al-Bāqillānī’s contribution to this evidence, see: Iskenderoglu, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World*, pp. 33-38.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, n.d., reprint of the Turkish edition of 1928) p. 58

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: al-Juwainī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, pp. 262-8, and also, al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, pp. 266-8.

<sup>7</sup> I do not mean to suggest al-Rāzī was the first Ash‘arī to posit these five proofs, for we notice the beginnings of this in the writings of al-Juwainī. However, the classification of five specific arguments does appear to originate from al-Rāzī; al-Ījī would later adopt and standardise this.

acquired. In his *Kitāb al-Muhaṣṣal*, he writes, “...it is obligatory to know God’s existence, and this can only be achieved through contemplation (*nazar*).”<sup>1</sup> Later in this same work, he lists four arguments that can be used to prove God’s existence:

- 1) The argument from the contingency of bodies
- 2) The argument from the contingency of accidents
- 3) The argument from the createdness of bodies
- 4) The argument from the createdness of accidents

In his work *Nihāya al-‘uqūl* (which remains in manuscript form), he adds a fifth:<sup>2</sup>

- 5) The teleological argument from the design and order of the universe.

It appears that through the course of his life, al-Rāzī’s stance vacillated from an early preference for the *kalām* cosmological arguments, to a later preference of the Avicennian contingency arguments over the *kalām* cosmological ones; regardless, he considered all to be valid.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Ibn Taymiyya’s Views on the Proof for God’s Existence

Ibn Taymiyya’s criticism of the cosmological proofs is a recurrent theme in the majority of his works, and an exhaustive survey of his specific critiques would take up a

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Muhaṣṣal*, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> See: Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, pp. 81-86; Iskenderoglu, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Thomas Aquinas on the Question of the Eternity of the World*, pp. 110-115. These five proofs are summarized in both of these works, and the reader is referred back to them for further details. Also see: Madjid, Nurcholish, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa* (Chicago: Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation presented to the University of Chicago, 1984), pp. 125-128.

Ibn Taymiyya quotes from *Nihāyat al-‘Uqūl* and lists these five methods, offering a very brief critique of the first four, and agreeing with the final one, in *DT*, vol. 3, pp. 72-87. We shall mention some of his criticisms in the next section.

<sup>3</sup> Shihadeh, Ayman, “The Existence of God,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 198-9; Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, p. 79; A. Abdel Hakeem, *The Metaphysics of the Idea of God in Ibn Taymiyya’s Thought*, pp. 91-2.

separate volume. In the following we will highlight some of his salient tactics and critiques against this proof, summarizing his overall view of the *dalīl*, whilst according particular attention to Ibn Taymiyya's critique of the *dalīl* in his *Dar'*. In addition, Ibn Taymiyya's alternatives to the cosmological proof will be mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2.1 Ibn Taymiyya's Proofs for the Existence of God

Ibn Taymiyya felt that the emphasis the *mutakallimūn* and *falsāfiya* accorded to the exercise of attempting to prove God's existence was highly exaggerated. For Ibn Taymiyya, God "...created His creation with an innate knowledge affirming His existence and acknowledging Him – it is a part of one's being, and necessarily ingrained in them."<sup>2</sup> He is referring here to the notion of the human *fitra*, which will be discussed in the next section in much greater detail.

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<sup>1</sup> Here I must express my disagreement with Wael Hallaq's analysis of Ibn Taymiyya's views on this issue. In his "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Orientalia LII* (1991), p. 49, he writes:

The reader of Ibn Taymiyya's works is initially struck by the simplicity of his discourse about the existence of God. Ibn Taymiyya believed that God's existence is self-evident and that any believer of sound disposition knows that God exists without any reflection. This may explain why he *never made the slightest effort to expound a structured and complete argument* for God's existence. Nowhere in his treatises does he make more than a brief comment on the issue, and this he does only with reference to other problems under discussion" [emphasis mine].

It is difficult to imagine how Hallaq could have made such sweeping generalizations when, from the references in his paper, he seems to have consulted only a dozen or so works by Ibn Taymiyya. Furthermore, perhaps the most important work in this regard, Ibn Taymiyya's *Kitāb al-nubuwat*, has no reference made to it. As this section shows, it is quite clear (and particularly in light of Ibn Taymiyya's notion of the *fitra*) that Ibn Taymiyya had a fully formulated doctrine and a well-thought out theological argument regarding God's existence. It is perhaps true to claim that he did not write a separate work on the topic, but this can be said for many other issues; it was Ibn Taymiyya's style to write at length regarding many topics with frequent, and detailed, tangents. Clearly, there is enough material on the notion of *fitra* to demonstrate Ibn Taymiyya's comprehensive alternatives to the *kalām* proofs for God's existence.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 46. Also see: Abrahamov, Binyamin., "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20:1 (1993) p. 26, where he briefly contrasts al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya on this point.

While the *fīṭra* was, for Ibn Taymiyya, the primary mechanism of affirming God's existence, it was not the only one. He felt that the strongest Qur'ānic proof, after the innate knowledge of God's existence, was the proof from the ephemeral nature of creation, including the createdness of man. Man knows instinctively that he is created, just as he knows that the other animals, plants, minerals, clouds and objects around him are created, and that every creation is in need of a Creator. Thus, the very fact that man is a created object is evidence of the existence of a Creator, which is not in need of evidence itself. The *kalām* cosmological argument seeks to prove the createdness of man; for Ibn Taymiyya, this was a fact that the Qur'ānic methodology took for granted, using it to prove the existence of a Creator, as, for example, in Q. 52:35, “*Were they created from nothing, or did they create themselves?*”<sup>1</sup>

From the Qur'ānic proofs for the existence of God, according to Ibn Taymiyya, are the miracles of the prophets, such as the miracles given to Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.<sup>2</sup> This was the primary method that God used to prove His existence to those who claimed to deny it,<sup>3</sup> for not only does it inform of His Existence, it also informs of His Unicity, and the truth of His prophets.<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyya writes,<sup>5</sup>

The miracle itself informs of the truth of the Messenger, which necessitates the existence of the One who has sent him. So the miracle *qua* miracle is a sign of the

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 219 and vol. 3, p. 98. He stresses that the difference between this and the *dalīl* is that the knowledge that man and his surrounding animals and plants are created is something that is necessary and known, and does not need to be proven.

<sup>2</sup> See *DT*, vol. 3, pp. 308-318; vol. 7, pp. 299-300, and p. 241; vol. 8, pp. 238-239. Also see: W. Hallaq, “Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,” pp. 59-61.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 352.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, pp. 299-300.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 9, p. 41. Also see: *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā* vol. 11, pp. 378-9.

Creator who causes it, and that He has caused it in order to provide evidence for the truth of His Messenger. And the story of Moses [with Pharaoh] is an example of this.

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the presence of these authentic, simple, and accessible Qur'ānic evidences circumvented the need to resort to convoluted methods that neither the prophets nor the early Muslims (*viz.* the *salaf*) ever called to.

The ways to achieve knowledge of an object are many, claims Ibn Taymiyya, and depend on how apparent that object is. For Ibn Taymiyya, the ways to know of God's existence exceed any other matter, since God is the greatest of all beings and the most known of all entities. In fact, for Ibn Taymiyya, *everything* is a proof for God's existence, since there can be no creation – nor contemplation of that creation – without a Creator who created and endowed man with rational faculties. Thus, it is preposterous to limit the proofs of His existence to a few methods as proposed by the scholars of *kalām* and *falsafa*.<sup>1</sup> Hallaq comments on Ibn Taymiyya's views:<sup>2</sup>

Everything in the world is a Sign of the Creator, be it an insect, a sun, a stone, a river, a mountain, etc. The Signs are innumerable, and each and every one points to the one and only Creator. God is seen in every Sign, for no Sign can exist without having been created by Him. Accordingly, there exists for Ibn Taymiyya an ontological and logical relation of necessary concomitance (*talāzum*) between God and any given Sign, and the apprehension of this concomitance tolerates no doubt whatsoever. A creature can have no existence without being concomitant with its Creator.

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 59.

Ibn al-Qayyim writes that he would frequently hear his teacher say, “How does one go about finding evidence for the One who Himself is the evidence for everything else?”<sup>1</sup>

### 1.2.2 Ibn Taymiyya’s Critique of the Kalām Cosmological Argument

Since Ibn Taymiyya felt that knowledge of God’s existence was ingrained in every sentient being, he obviously found the Ash‘arī claim of *wujūb al-naṣar* (‘the obligation to reason’)<sup>2</sup> outrageous. He points out that the Ash‘arīs seem to differ over the first obligation upon the one of legal age: some said that it was knowledge of God (*ma‘rifa*); others that it was to reason and speculate (*al-naṣar*); or perhaps the intention to speculate (*al-qasd ilā al-naṣar*); whereas some even claimed that the first obligation was to doubt everything (*al-shakk*). However, Ibn Taymiyya concedes that this difference is only semantic in nature, as the net result of all of these opinions is that, for the Ash‘arīs, God’s existence must be proven through rational means.<sup>3</sup>

And this notion was imported, Ibn Taymiyya charges, straight from Mu‘tazilī principles, even though the Ash‘arīs claim that this was the position of all the classical

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, ed. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1997), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> The Ash‘arīs claimed that the first obligation of the one of legal age was to reason and research, first proving God’s Existence, then His Monotheism, then, finally, affirm the truth of the Prophet. Only after having rationally established Islam do the Ash‘arīs then allow belief in the Scriptures and all that it entails. See for example: al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, pp. 22-5; al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 68; al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fi-l-itiqād*, pp. 18-26; al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Muhaṣṣal*, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 7, p. 353 and also p. 419. Ibn Taymiyya seems to ascribe the first obligation as being ‘to doubt’ to al-Ghazālī.

The similarities between al-Ghazālī and Descartes in initiating their search via skepticism are too strong to ignore, and this has been the topic of much study. See for example: Akdogan, Cemil, “Ghazālī, Descartes and Hume: The Genealogy of Some Philosophical Ideas,” *Islamic Studies* 42:3 (Autumn, 2003), pp. 487-502.

scholars.<sup>1</sup> Some amongst the Ash‘arīs even claimed that this was the position of the four Imams of Islamic law; yet it is well known, Ibn Taymiyya says, that such an opinion never originated from them.<sup>2</sup> In fact, numerous verses from the Qur‘ān and ḥadīth of the Prophet demonstrate that the first obligation upon one of legal age is to testify the *shahāda*, and then worship God. This is demonstrated, Ibn Taymiyya claims, by the first revelation of the Qur‘ān [viz., Q. 96:1-4], and the famous tradition of Mu‘ādh b. Jabal who, when the Prophet sent him to Yemen, was instructed, “...let the first thing you do be to call them to testify that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God.”<sup>3</sup> It is because of this, Ibn Taymiyya writes, that there is unanimous consensus amongst all the scholars of Islam that if a non-Muslim were to sincerely utter the *shahāda*, that utterance is all that is needed for him to be considered a Muslim, without the need for him to ‘speculate’ or ‘reason’ God’s existence.<sup>4</sup>

For Ibn Taymiyya, God did not command His creation to seek out knowledge of a Creator; rather, what a person is legally obliged to do is to know that God alone is worthy of being worshipped, and to avoid worshipping other beings (*shirk*).<sup>5</sup> In fact, the most famous person to claim that God does not exist was Pharaoh, and the Qur‘ān explicitly points out that he was lying in this claim, and that internally he did believe

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<sup>1</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 7; also see *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* vol. 16, pp. 332-9; Madjid, Nurcholish, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 398.

that God had sent Moses as a Prophet.<sup>1</sup> All of this proves, for Ibn Taymiyya, that atheism is an atypical and unnatural phenomenon that does not deserve the consideration given to it by his interlocutors.

Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya points out that the Ash‘arī obligation of ‘speculation’ contradicts another Ash‘arī doctrine: that of claiming there can be no obligation until the *Shari‘a* is revealed. Ibn Taymiyya expresses his incredulity: how can the Ash‘arīs claim that the rational intellect cannot obligate anything on a person (based on their premise of denying the intellect’s role in deciding good and evil), yet simultaneously posit that the first obligation upon a person is to prove God’s Existence!<sup>2</sup> Moreover, this leads to a further position that some Ash‘arīs were forced to adopt, which is that the one who believes in God without investigation, merely parroting the claims of his elders, does not actually have true faith (*viz.*, the issue of *īmān al-muqallid*). This contradicts the understanding and practice of the early generations of Islam, who viewed an individual as being Muslim even if he imitated the religion of his Muslim forefathers.<sup>3</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also criticizes the ambiguity inherent in the term ‘speculation’ (*nazar*), and the Ash‘arī assertion that necessitates the presence of doubt prior to this obligatory exercise of reason. Rather, the correct view as judged by Ibn Taymiyya is the

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 8, pp. 38–9. He uses a number of verses to prove his point, in particular Q. 17:102 and Q. 27:14.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 8, pp. 12–13. The Ash‘arīs posit that there can be no legal prohibition or commandment before God’s Law is revealed, based on their denying the efficacy of the intellect in deciding good from evil (*viz.*, the issue of negating *tahṣīn wa taqbīh al-‘aql*).

<sup>3</sup> See: *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, pp. 340–6. Particularly for faith (*īmān*), the Ash‘arite premise that blind following is not acceptable would preclude believing in God merely because one’s family and ancestors did so. Ibn Taymiyya finds this specific requirement particularly unsavory. He remarks wryly that this creed is demanding its followers to disbelieve in order that they believe! See: DT, vol. 8, p. 10.

acknowledgment of, "...a difference between considering evidences (*al-naṣar fī al-dalīl*), and searching for them (*al-naṣar fī ṭalab al-dalīl*), for the former does not require one to be in doubt of the conclusion."<sup>1</sup> He illustrates this by pointing out that a researcher can be fully certain of a matter, and yet still research for evidences to support his certainty. And this, he argues, should be the approach of the believer even if he feels the need to prove God's existence: to do otherwise is a very rejection of the faith that one is trying to prove!

Since he argued that knowledge of God was innate in man, he claimed that "...God's existence can be proven neither through syllogistic and inductive inference, nor, for that matter, by means of any other inference."<sup>2</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya, if a person's intuition (i.e., *fitra*) was not sufficient to affirm God's existence, the only other recourse to 'correct' this corrupted intuition would be via exercising a sound understanding of the faculty of reason.<sup>3</sup> And since necessary knowledge (*'ilm darūrī*) is of course superior to acquired knowledge (*'ilm muktasab*), any proofs offered by the scholars of *kalām* that require introspection can never attain the level of certainty enjoyed by the inherent, natural, necessary knowledge of God that God placed in man (via the *fitra*).<sup>4</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya chastises the Mu'tazilīs for disregarding this God-given, *fitra*-based knowledge of Him, and suggests this neglect as being a product of over-rationalizing God's actions. "For the Mu'tazilīs say," he writes, "...that if faith were a gift from God to

<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, 420-1.

<sup>2</sup> W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Oriental*, LII (1991), p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Some examples of this have preceded in the previous section; we shall have the opportunity to elaborate yet more on this notion in the section on Ibn Taymiyya's notion of *fitra*.

<sup>4</sup> See: *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, pp. 15-6; W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," *Acta Oriental*, LII (1991), p. 57. Again, we shall return to this point in more detail in the next section.

His servant, and a blessing from Him, then the servant would not deserve reward for it. Therefore, they claimed that faith could only be realized via a man's search for it.”<sup>1</sup>

One of Ibn Taymiyya's recurring criticisms against al-Rāzī's *dalīl* is the claim that its innovative status (*bid'a*) is beyond dispute: no one can prove that the prophets of God proclaimed belief in ‘substances’ and ‘accidents’ and enjoined mankind to prove God’s existence through such means, nor did any of the Companions of the Prophet do so. Certainly, no one can claim that this is a path sanctioned by God.<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya frequently attributes this *dalīl* to Jahm b. Ṣafwān, or the Jahmīs, claiming that it is from Jahm that the Mu'tazilīs, and in particular Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf, adapted it.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, he opined that Jahm took this from the pagans, or Jews, or Sabeans, or unspecified ‘others’;<sup>4</sup> it goes without saying that, for the *salafī* Ibn Taymiyya, the ‘foreignness’ of a doctrine is sufficient proof to evidence its inherent un-Islamic nature.

Therefore, in Ibn Taymiyya's views, those advocating the use of these evidence are calling to and following a path other than that of the Prophet and his Companions.<sup>5</sup> And how can one reconcile the Qur'ānic claim extolling the virtues of the Companions of the Prophet as being the best of all generations – those who are universally

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 460.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 9, pp. 321-3. It appears that either Ibn Taymiyya overlooked the fact that al-Rāzī and others make just such a claim, through the story of Abraham, or that he felt the claim so specious as to be unworthy of mention. Ibn Taymiyya is clearly aware of al-Rāzī's evidence since he refutes it in quite some detail, as we shall show in Section 3.2 of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 7, pp. 143-4. I also talk about this issue at length in my MA thesis *Maqālat al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān wa Atharuhā fī al-Firaq al-Islāmiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 311-377. As has been pointed out in Chapter One of this dissertation, this claim of Ibn Taymiyya's is rather dubious, and it is difficult to verify, and highly unlikely, that Jahm was propagating this proof. Additionally, al-'Allāf died more than a century after Jahm, so it is impossible for al-'Allāf to have taken anything from Jahm directly, and it is highly unlikely that Jahm left any writings.

<sup>4</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 7, pp. 143-4, p. 170, p. 176, p. 242; vol. 8, p. 12; *Minhāj al-Sunna*, vol. 1, p. 315; vol. 2, pp. 610-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 255.

acknowledged as being the greatest in faith and knowledge – with the fact that not one of them, nor even any individual from the generations succeeding them, ever employed this *dalīl*, nor did they claim that the createdness of accidents in a body necessitates the createdness of the body, or that any body composed of accidents must be created, nor did they deny the infinite regression of causes.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it is because of its reprehensible and innovated status that the *Ahl al-Sunna* unanimously agreed in rejecting it,<sup>2</sup> including such luminaries as al-Shāfi‘ī<sup>3</sup> and of course Ahmad b. Ḥanbal<sup>4</sup>. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya goes so far as to claim that the disapproval of the early scholars (i.e., the *salaf*) of the entire science of rationalist theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) was due primarily to this very *dalīl*.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya demonstrated that the *dalīl* was overly complicated in its premises, while its conclusions were self-evident and manifest, claiming that most of the proofs that the scholars of *kalām* used to prove God’s existence were either faulty or extremely convoluted and complex.<sup>6</sup> Rather than calling towards the religion

<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 313. Also see: DT, vol. 1, 283, 291; vol. 4, p. 134; vol. 7, p. 408 and vol. 8, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 12; *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 3, p. 303, and vol 5, p. 543.

<sup>3</sup> He quotes the famous statement attributed to al-Shāfi‘ī, “Were a servant to meet his Lord with every sin other than *shirk* is more beloved to me that he meet Him with anything of these innovations,” and claims that he said this because of the ‘Proof of God from the Createdness of Accidents’. See: DT, vol. 7, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> He quotes Ibn Ḥanbal as saying, “The scholars of *kalām* are heretics (*zanādiqa*),” and says that this is because they denied the Divine Attributes based on the *dalīl*. See: DT, vol. 7, p. 275, 232; vol. 7, p. 158, 234-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 473.

<sup>6</sup> DT, vol. 3, p. 72.

of the Divinely sent prophets, he argued that they opened the doors for rejection of Divine Scripture and doubt regarding the veracity of the Prophets.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya pointed out that the groups of *kalām* differed amongst themselves in many of the premises of this *dalīl*, most of which were not indubitable, and the rest of which were so perplexing that only the most intelligent of people could understand them. This *dalīl*, according to him, is “...like a piece of lean camel meat, placed on the peak of a steep mountain, neither is it juicy meat to take nor is it easy to reach.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, he advocated, the Qur’ānic proofs for God’s existence are not only indubitable, but also simple and non-complex.<sup>3</sup>

One deliberate tactic of the propagators of the *dalīl*, according to Ibn Taymiyya, is to employ ambiguous words and vague phrases – words and phrases that have not been used by either God or His Messenger, including ‘accidents’ (*‘arāq*) and ‘bodies’ (*jism*) and ‘occupying space’ (*tahayyuz*).<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyya proposes that these are stepping stones toward denial of the explicit language of the Qur’ān and ḥadīth, so as to couch the their true intents from the masses who, by dint of their *fīṭra*, would balk at an explicit rejection of the Scripture. Perhaps worse, he claims: the Ash‘arīs intentionally aimed at intimidating neophytes with complex terminologies and syllogisms, to overawe them into acquiescence and submission.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 97. In another place, he writes, “So neither did the propagators of the ‘Proof of Accidents and the Createdness of Bodies’ benefit Islam, nor did they destroy the *falsāfa*.” See: *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 12, p. 590.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, vol. 1, p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> See especially: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 301-17, where he discusses the ‘foreignness’ of specific *kalām* terminologies.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 295-6.

As an example of this, Ibn Taymiyya points out that the scholars of *kalām* always deny God any corporeal reality (*jism*). He takes up many hundreds of pages addressing this issue in the context of al-Rāzī’s *Ta’sīs al-Taqdīs*.<sup>1</sup> He writes that this word was neither affirmed nor denied by the earliest of generations and the scholars of ḥadīth.<sup>2</sup> It was not affirmed because there is an implicit meaning that is clearly not befitting God, which is to say that God is a created entity with three dimensions, and of course, Ibn Taymiyya says, no one would claim this of God from amongst the true believers. But if by ‘*jism*’ is meant an entity that is characterized by multiple attributes and is an active Being that has an independent Will, and Creates, Sees, and Speaks, and is above the creation, then clearly these are all attributes that the Qur’ān ascribes to God, and a god with these Attributes is truly a God, in contrast to a God whose only attributes are negative or attributional.<sup>3</sup> Instead of explicitly rejecting the Qur’ān’s numerous verses about God’s transcendent nature (‘ulūww), Ibn Taymiyya says, the *mutakallimūn* claim that God cannot be a *jism* (body), and affirming a direction (*jiha*) necessitates God having a *jism*, therefore God cannot have a direction.<sup>4</sup> Thus these terms, Ibn Taymiyya writes, incorporate some elements of truth and some elements of falsehood, and should

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, in his earlier refutation of this work, the *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 50-118. Also, recall that al-Rāzī himself makes this issue the cornerstone of the work, and even considers the Muslim who does not deny God’s being a *jism* an unbeliever. See: *Ta’sīs al-Taqdīs*, p. 34 and pp. 67-9.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 10, p. 306. Also see: Madjid, Nurcholish, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 130.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 10, pp. 306-9; vol. 1, pp. 111-9; vol. 6, p. 163, p. 306; vol. 10, pp. 310-1; *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 101-5. By ‘negative’, he meant the *via negativa* approach of describing what God was not, rather than what God was. And by ‘attributional’ he meant those attributes that are not inherent to God but merely describe His relationship vis-à-vis another entity.

<sup>4</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 271-5; vol. 5, p. 57.

therefore only be used in conjunction with clarifications as to the precise meaning intended.<sup>1</sup>

Another central and also ambiguous word specific to the practitioners of *kalām* is ‘accident’ (*‘arad*). The basis of the *dalīl* is the definition and createdness of this concept. Yet, urges Ibn Taymiyya, the Ash‘arī definition of an accident as ‘*that which does not persist for two consecutive instants*’ is itself a contested and innovated one. Furthermore, “...the Companions, all of them, died without ever knowing that an accident is that which does not persist for two consecutive instants!”<sup>2</sup>

Another flaw of the *dalīl* that Ibn Taymiyya addresses includes the internal contradictions amongst the practitioners of *kalām* regarding many of the premises of the proof. Ibn Taymiyya revels in identifying this internal discord, considering it a sign of the uncertain nature of *kalām* definitions and syllogisms. For example, he demonstrates that the scholars of *kalām* differed regarding the existence of the ‘solitary atom’ (*al-jawhar al-fard*),<sup>3</sup> for the existence or non-existence of it is crucial in understanding what may or may not be attributed to a body (*jism*). Ibn Taymiyya also points out that both al-Āmidī and al-Armawī (d. 682/1283)<sup>4</sup> found the *dalīl* to be problematic;<sup>5</sup> that al-Armawī refuted al-Āmidī’s claim of the possibility of the

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 2, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 48-51. Also see: *DT*, vol. 6, pp. 268-70; *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* vol. 6, pp. 225-6; and vol. 16, p 275.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 302 and p. 393. The Ash‘arīs as a whole did affirm the existence of the *jawhar al-fard*; it was some Mu‘tazilīs, most prominently Ḫirār b. ‘Amr and al-Nazzām who denied its possibility. See: Ibn Taymiyya, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyya*, vol. 1, pp. 284-5.

<sup>4</sup> His full name is Maḥmūd b. Abī Bakr Aḥmad al-Armawī. He was an Aremenian by birth, and lived most of his life in Konya, Turkey. He wrote a number of seminal works in Ash‘arite theology, foremost amongst them *Lubāb al-Arba‘īn*. See: al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īyya al-Kubrā*, vol. 5, p. 155.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 2, p. 389.

occurrence of a contingent event without a cause;<sup>1</sup> that al-Armawī refuted al-Rāzī in his claim of the impossibility of an infinite regression of accidents;<sup>2</sup> or that al-Armawī even found all five of al-Rāzī’s proofs for God’s existence problematic.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya even goes so far as to claim that there is not a single premise of this *dalil* except that the Ash‘arīs themselves disagreed over particulars within it, or perhaps even its legitimacy.<sup>4</sup>

The motif of the ‘repentant *mutakallim*’ is one that Ibn Taymiyya frequently resorts to, in many of his writings.<sup>5</sup> According to him, not only did the scholars of didactic theology disagree about the premises of this *dalil*, but, perhaps even more poignantly, many eventually rejected, and repented, from it. First and foremost amongst such penitent figures is none other than the eponymous founder of the school, for, as Ibn Taymiyya claims, al-Ash‘arī explicitly dissociated himself from this *dalil* and claimed that, not only was it lengthy and convoluted, “...it [was] an innovated method [introduced] into the religion of the prophets, and therefore impermissible (*muḥarram*) to use.”<sup>6</sup> And it wasn’t just some early scholars of the Ash‘arī school, such as al-

<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 338-230.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 2, p. 344 –vol. 3, p. 33. Also he points out that al-Rāzī himself seems to have problematized some of these ways in other writings of his; see *DT*, vol. 3, p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 2, pp. 389-90, vol. 3, p. 30, vol. 3, pp. 451-3, vol. 4, pp. 267-8; *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* vol. 12, p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 156-160, where both al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī are quoted as having ‘repented’ from the science of *kalām*.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 2, p. 13. Also see: *DT*, vol. 4, p. 268; vol. 7, p. 71, pp. 208-212, p. 219, pp. 223-4; vol. 8, pp. 100-102; *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* vol. 3, pp. 303-4.

Ibn Taymiyya bases this observation on a passage in al-‘Asharī’s *Risāla ilā Ahl al-Thaghr*, ed. Muhammad al-Sayyid al-Julaynī (Cairo: Dār al-Liwa‘, 1989), pp. 52-3, where he writes that the Qur‘ānic evidences for God’s existence are

Khaṭṭābī,<sup>1</sup> who rejected this *dalīl*: even some of the greatest of the *falāsifa*, such as Ibn Rushd, pointed out that its syllogisms were invalid and that the prophetic methodology for proving God's existence was more rationally sound.<sup>2</sup>

Another disagreement that Ibn Taymiyya expressed with the *dalīl* is that it relies on the premise that an infinite regression of accidents (*tasalsul al-hawādith*) is impossible. Ibn Taymiyya spills much ink in vigorously disagreeing with this premise,<sup>3</sup> while also pointing out that this issue is one that is difficult for the mind to grasp (*maharāt al-'uqūl*).<sup>4</sup> Historically, he outlines, there have been three positions taken on infinite regressions: the first opinion is that both pre-eternal and sempiternal regressions are not possible; this was the position of Jahm b. Ṣafwān and Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf.<sup>5</sup> The second opinion, that of the majority of the *mutakallimūn*, allowed sempiternal regressions but not pre-eternal, permitting them to believe in the eternality of the created souls in Heaven and Hell. The third and final position, Ibn

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clearer than the evidence of *dalīl al-'arād*, which '...is used by the *falāsifa* and those who followed them from the innovated sects.'

<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, pp. 292-4. He quotes al-Khaṭṭābī as saying this *dalīl* conflicts with the prophetic methods of proving God's existence.

<sup>2</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 1, p. 260, vol. 7, p. 295; and *Bayān Talbīs*, vol. 1, p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> This also led to charges – completely unfounded of course – that Ibn Taymiyya believed in the eternality of the world, which in turn led to accusations of blasphemy and even *kufr*. See: El-Rouayeb, Khaled, "From Ibn Hajar al-Haytami to Khayr al-Din al-Alusi: Changing Views of Ibn Taymiyya Amongst Non-Hanbali Sunni Scholars," in Y. Rapoport and S. Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup> *Minhāj al-Sunna*, vol. 1, p. 299.

<sup>5</sup> They both claimed that people in Heaven and Hell would eventually become motionless and freeze in time and space, since accidents would cease to exist.

Taymiyya says, is that of the *salaf* and *Ahl al-Sunna*: that both pre-eternal and sempiternal regressions are allowed.<sup>1</sup>

The above is with respect to the notion of infinite regressions as a whole. With respect to the types of infinite regressions, Ibn Taymiyya divided these into three categories, two of which he claimed were impossible, and a third not only possible, but in fact praiseworthy for God. It is impossible, he claims, to have an infinite regression of causes (*'ilal*), or an infinite regression of actors (*fā'il*). Moreover, to allow for such an infinite regression would imply, *inter alia*, that God has a creator, and this is clearly the highest level of blasphemy – one that the Prophet explicitly ascribed to Satan's whisperings.<sup>2</sup> These two infinite regressions are not affirmed by any believer in God. However, it is possible to have an infinite regression of caused effects (*athār*), which would imply that before any particular effect or creation, there was a previous effect or creation, *ad infinitum*. And this, argues Ibn Taymiyya, is more befitting the majesty of God – that He is and has been and shall remain an active Creator, ever creating and acting at His Will. In fact, this type of infinite regression has been allowed by many of the *falāsifa*, and most intelligent people ('*uqalā'*) will not find it problematic.<sup>3</sup> Rather, the

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<sup>1</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 1, p. 363; vol. 4, pp. 292–3; vol. 9, pp. 180–5; vol. 9, pp. 238–41. In my extensive reading of pre-Ibn Taymiyyan works of Ḥanbalite theology, I was not able to find any reference to this discussion. It also seems unlikely that anyone before Ibn Taymiyya would have discussed ‘infinite regressions’ from within the Ḥanablite theological circles, hence I am somewhat skeptical of ascribing this position to the ‘*salaf*’.

<sup>2</sup> Here he is referencing the well-known tradition of the Prophet, “Satan will come to one of you, and continue asking, ‘Who created this?’ and he will respond, ‘God,’ until finally he shall ask, ‘And who created God?’ So when one of you finds himself in that state, let him seek refuge in God, and stop!” Reported by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *The Book of the Beginning of Creation*: Chapter: Iblīs and His Army, vol. 2, p. 348.

<sup>3</sup> This is an over-simplified discussion of a very complex issue. See, for example: *DT*, vol. 1, p. 305, pp. 321–364; vol. 2, pp. 267–287; vol. 3, pp. 144–158; vol. 7, pp. 240–1; vol. 8, pp. 345–6; vol. 9, pp. 180–5, pp. 238–241; *Majmu‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, pp. 231–233; *Minhāj al-Sunna*, vol. 1, pp. 146–438.

Jon Hoover discusses this issue in more detail in his article “Perpetual Creativity in the Perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya’s Hadith Commentary on God’s Creation of This World,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15:3 (2004), pp. 287–329,

view of the *mutakallimūn* in affirming a God that was inactive (and perhaps even incapable of being active), and who then became active, is one that is not in accordance with the Qur’ān, the ḥadīth, or even common sense.<sup>1</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya reserved his harshest criticism for this *dalīl* because of its implications in the theological understanding of God’s Attributes;<sup>2</sup> he realized that the *mutakallimūn* relied primarily on this *dalīl* in interpreting God’s Attributes away from what Ibn Taymiyya pronounced to be their primary meanings. This is because, from the perspective of Ibn Taymiyya, the *mutakallimūn* did not spare even God from the premises and intricacies of this *dalīl*, and in their over-zealousness to affirm that God was not a ‘body’, denied ‘accidents’ (*‘arad*) subsisting in Him. Furthermore, since each group amongst the people of *kalām* had its own definition of ‘accident’, they differed in their understanding of God’s Attributes. For the Mu’tazilīs, all of God’s Attributes could be construed as accidents, whereas for the Ash‘arīs it was only those Attributes that changed over time (i.e., those related to the Will of God) which were classified thus. Based on this distinction, Ibn Taymiyya said, the Mu’tazilīs rejected all affirmatory Attributes and claimed that to affirm such an Attribute as subsisting in God would imply that God was a body, hence created.<sup>3</sup> The Ash‘arīs, on the other hand, affirmed

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and also in his monograph *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 80-95. He mentions that in one work alone, Ibn Taymiyya’s *Minhāj al-Sunna*, he devotes close to a volume (around 270 printed pages) discussing his arguments and refuting the case for the impossibility of all types of regressions.

Also see: Ajhar, Abdel Hakeem., *The Metaphysics of the Idea of God in Ibn Taymiyya’s Thought*, pp. 186-193.

<sup>1</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 9, p. 185, and *Majmū‘ al-fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Hallaq writes, “Ibn Taymiyya flatly rejected the Greek and Islamic philosophers’ proofs as too abstract, proving, if anything, the existence of a deity that is not endowed with qualities which ought to be particular only to God.” W. Hallaq, “Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,” *Acta Orientalia*, LII (1991), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> As an example of this, Qaḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār writes, concerning the Divine Attribute of life (*al-ḥayāt*), “The essential point here is that if God were living with a ‘life’ (*ḥayāt*) – and *ḥayāt* cannot be recognized unless the place in which it

the seven eternal, unchanging Attributes, but refused to affirm God's 'descent' (*nuzūl*), His 'rising over the throne' (*istiwā*), His speech that was related to His Will (*irāda*), as well as the majority of other attributes mentioned in the Divine Texts.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Ibn Taymiyya paid much attention to the issue of God's Transcendence and how the *mutakallimūn* could not affirm it in light of this *dalīl*.<sup>2</sup> But it was not only the denial of these Attributes that irked him: he went so far as to claim that the majority of theological deviations that these groups of *kalām* fell into stem from this *dalīl*.<sup>3</sup>

Lastly, and for our purposes most importantly, in Ibn Taymiyya's views it was the existence of the *dalīl* that necessitated the formulation of the *Qānūn*. Had it not been for the *dalīl*, the scholars of *kalām* would not have problematized so many of the Sacred Texts, or needed to resort to fanciful interpretations to resolve 'perceived conflicts' between 'reason' and 'revelation'; thus, Ibn Taymiyya proclaims the *Qānūn* as being a direct result of the *dalīl* and its false implications.<sup>4</sup>

Before summarizing and moving on from this section, it is relevant to mention Ibn Taymiyya's narrative concerning al-Rāzī's encounter with a Ḥanفī. He says that once al-Rāzī was with an unnamed Mu'tazilī friend, and one of the eminent Ṣūfīs of Jurjān

resides is recognized – this would imply that the Eternal has a body (*jism*), and this is impossible. And the same applies to 'power' (*qudrah*), since 'power' cannot be acted with until the place in which it resides also participated in that act even if it be in a partial manner. So [if this were the case] it would be obligatory that God be a body (*jism*), allowing accidents to occur in Him, and this is not possible." See his *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>1</sup> Al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*, which was summarized in the first chapter, is a perfect example of this. Based on the fact that God cannot have 'accidents', he then lists dozens of Divine Attributes that need to be re-interpreted and understood in a metaphorical manner.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: *DT*, vol. 7, p. 71 and vol. 1, p. 375.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Majmū' al-fatāwā*, vol. 8, p. 149; *Minhāj al-Sunna*, vol. 1, p. 311; *Bayān talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, vol. 1, p. 131; *DT*, vol. 1, p. 41, p. 306; vol. 7, p. 71, vol. 6, p. 183

<sup>4</sup> See: *DT*, 1. p. 91. Also recall that some of the lengthiest of Ibn Taymiyya's forty-four points of the *Dar'* dealt with refuting the *dalīl*; in particular, the nineteenth, thirty-first and thirty-third points.

visited them, a certain Ahmād al-Khiwārī Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā.<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya continues:<sup>2</sup>

They asked him, “It has reached us that you have attained certain knowledge,” to which the Shaykh replied, “Yes, my knowledge [of God] is certain.” At which they asked, “But how could you have attained this knowledge, when the two of us debate back and forth, for long periods of time, every time one of us establishes a proof, the other destroys it... explain to us whence this certainty comes from!” The Shaykh said, “These are thoughts that wander (*wāridāt*) upon the soul, and the soul is incapable of rejecting them.” And the two of them were amazed at this phrase, and continued to repeat it, for the Shaykh – may God have mercy on him – informed them of that necessary knowledge (*ilm darūri*) that is inherently associated with the heart to such an extent that the heart cannot expel it.

Regardless of the authenticity of the narrative, the moral is clear: the greatest scholars of *kalām* could not achieve the type of religious certainty that a simple worshipper could arrive at.

In summary, Ibn Taymiyya argued against the ‘Proof for the Existence of God from the Createdness of Accidents’ from a number of perspectives, most importantly:

- God created man with the intuitive knowledge that He exists, hence there is no need for laypeople to be instructed in the proofs for His existence (the argument based on the existence of the *fitra*)

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<sup>1</sup> The *nisba* is incorrectly given in the printed edition as ‘al-Hayūqī’; I have corrected it above. He is the founder of Kubrāwī ḥarīqa, and died in 617/1220. See: *EI2*, s.v. ‘Kubrā’ (Hamid Algar).

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 431.

- The Qur'ān addresses those who deny God, and Qur'ānic proofs yield full certainty, in contradistinction to the *kalām* proofs
- The Qur'ānic proofs are simple and easy to understand, whereas the *kalām* proofs are overly complicated, with intricate premises that the masses would not understand
- The *kalām* proofs have no basis in the religion of the prophets of God, or in the religious understanding of the best generations of Islam (the *salaf*)
- The practitioners of *kalām* scarcely agree on fundamental points relevant to the *dalīl*
- These same *mutakallimūn* frequently regret having propagated this *dalīl*
- The *dalīl* deliberately employs vague and ambiguous vocabulary
- The *dalīl* is founded on incorrect premises (for example the claim that an infinite regression is not possible)
- One of the necessary corollaries of this *dalīl* is to strip God of His Divine Attributes and Divine Actions that are affirmed in the Sacred Texts
- The *dalīl* opens up the door for others to reject the Divine Texts
- The *dalīl* was the direct cause of the formulation of al-Rāzī's *Qānūn*

## 2. *The Fitra: Ibn Taymiyya's Alternative*

Since both the Qur'ān and ḥadīth corpus affirm the notion of a human 'fitra',<sup>1</sup> it is not surprising to find Islamic theologians, regardless of background, interested in defining the role and scope of this element of human existence. Ibn Taymiyya gave particular prominence, perhaps more than any theologian preceding him, to the role of the *fitra*, especially in its epistemic authority in deriving knowledge of God.

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<sup>1</sup> The primary Qur'ānic reference is Q. 30:30, "And so, turn your face singlemindedly to the true faith - this is the *fitra* of Allah that He moulded (*fatara*) mankind upon." And in ḥadīth literature, the Prophet is reported to have said, "Every child is born upon the *fitra*. Then, his parents make him a Jew, Christian or Zoroastrian – just as an animal gives birth to an unbranded animal. Do you find any brandings on it, until you yourselves brand it?" See: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, The Book of Predestination*, Chapter: Every child is born on the *fitra*, vol. 4, p. 138.

A useful summary of the interpretations of the *fitra* may be found in: Mohamed, Yasien, "The Interpretations of *Fitrah*," *Islamic Studies* 34:2 (1995) pp. 129-151. However, I must point out that Mohamed's somewhat contrived classifications of these views into the tripartite schema of 'dual, neutral and positive' seems awkward. Additionally, he labels the view that the issue of predestination being relevant to the *fitra* as having been an 'extremist' position, but as Livnat Holtzman has shown in her article (see below), this is a fairly mainstream Sunnī interpretation that even Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim referenced.

Also see: *EI2*, s.v. 'Fitra' (D. B. Macdonald); A. Straface, "La *fitra* come espressione di iman," *Oriente Moderno* XI (LXXII), pp. 2-12; L. Holtzman, "Human Choice: Divine Guidance and the *Fitra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya" in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, Yossef Rapoport (ed.) (Oxford: OUP, 2010); F. Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*fitra*) and Its Background in the Teachings of al-Farābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102 (Jan., 2012), pp. 2-5; C. Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fitra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *Qantara* 21:2 (2000), pp. 392-95; F. Hussain, "Understanding the Role of the *Fitrah* in Resistance to Behavioral Change," *The Islamic Quarterly* 54:2, pp. 142-146; Gwynne, Rosalin Ward, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'ān: God's arguments* (London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 1-7.

Interestingly, some Jewish sects affirmed a similar notion in medieval Jewish theology (perhaps imported from this Islamic equivalent?). The Karaites took the position favored by the Mu'tazilīs, that there is no innate intuition that informs man of God's existence, whereas the Rabbinites maintained that God is known intuitively, without the need for rational evidence. Maimonides went so far as to claim that such an inherent knowledge of God is in fact a phylogenetic trait, such that whoever doubts God's existence cannot possibly be a biological descendant of the original Jews who stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. See: Faur, Jose, "Intuitive Knowledge of God in Medieval Jewish Theology," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 67:2/3 (Oct., 1976), pp. 92-3.

Although political interpretations are, of course, outside the scope of our discussion, the *fitra* has also been interpreted in modern contexts as somehow propelling man towards a revolutionary struggle against evil. In particular, Syed Qutb (d. 1966), Ali Shariati (d. 1977), and Abū-l-'Alā al-Mawdūdī (d. 1979) all viewed the establishment of a political Islamic system as being a necessary by-product of the *fitra*. See: M. Yasien, "The Interpretations of *Fitrah*," pp. 131-2; Andrew March, "Taking People as They Are: Islam As a 'Realistic Utopia' in the Political Theory of Sayyid Qutb," *American Political Science Review* 104:1 (2010), pp. 189-207; Frank Griffel, "The Harmony of Natural Law and *Shari'a* in Islamist Theology," in *Shari'a: Islamic Law in The Contemporary Context*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Frank Griffel (Stanford: SUP, 2007), pp. 38-61.

The Arabic word *fitra* is derived from the verb *fa-ṭa-ra*, which, as referenced in pre-Islamic poetry, was used to indicate a ‘cutting or splitting in half of an object’.<sup>1</sup> Based on this meaning, the term *fitra* has primarily been interpreted to mean some type of predisposition or natural order that has been ingrained into man before creation.<sup>2</sup> In European languages, a wide variety of terms have been offered as translations for this word, including ‘Allah’s way of creating’, ‘the natural basis of the true religion’, ‘a predisposition towards Islam’, ‘man’s nature’, ‘Stand der religiösen ‘Unschuld”’, and ‘inborn religion’.<sup>3</sup> For our purposes, we will keep the original term untranslated, and discuss the various interpretations that existed regarding it.

The *fitra* has, at least in Sunnī sources, been traditionally linked with the ‘Verse of the Covenant’ (*āya al-mīthāq*), also known as ‘The Day of Am-I-Not’ (*yawm alast*), referenced in Q. 7:172.<sup>4</sup> This Adamic Covenant (*mīthāq*)<sup>5</sup> also plays a crucial role in Ibn

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad b. Mukrim b. Mandhūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Sādir, 1994), vol. 5, p. 55. See also: C. Adang, “Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fitra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm,” p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 56-58.

<sup>3</sup> For these terms, see Holtzman, “Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fitra*” (*op. cit.*) ff. pp. 11.

<sup>4</sup> This connection has been made in almost all classical *tafsīrs*, as shall be demonstrated in the next section.

For a helpful overview of some of the main interpretations of this verse, see: Wadad Kadi, “The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qur’ān,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147:4 (Dec, 2003), pp. 332-338. There are alternative Sufi interpretations to this verse also, but these need not concern us here. For such interpretations see: L. Massignon, “Le ‘jour du covenant’ (*yawm al-mīthāq*)”, *Oriens* 15 (Dec. 31, 1962), pp. 87-90; U. Rubin, “Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the Concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*,” *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), pp. 67-72; A. Jeffrey, “Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*,” *Studia Islamica* 11 (1959), pp. 113-115; G. Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, pp.145-57.

For a discussion of this Covenant in other traditions, see: Leigh N. Chipman, “Mythic Aspects of the Process of Adam’s Creation in Judaism and Islam,” *Studia Islamica*, 93 (2001), pp. 5-25, and especially p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that while the term ‘*mīthāq*’ does not occur in the Qur’ān in reference to Adam’s conversation with God, it does occur in other contexts, notably as a Covenant between God and the Jews, or as a promise between God and the prophets that they shall recognize the Prophet Muḥammad when he comes. It is the ḥadīth literature that identifies the Adamic Covenant with the term *mīthāq*, and it is for this reason that all classical works of theology also designated it with the term *mīthāq*. See: Denny, Frederick Mathewson, “Some Religio-Communal Terms and Concepts in the Qur’ān,” *Numen* 24 (Apr., 1977), p. 50; Abdul Haq, Muḥammad., “The Meaning and Significance of the

Taymiyya's understanding of the *fitra*, as shall be elaborated in the next section; however, there is a surprising twist regarding his understanding of this term.

## 2.1 Pre-Ibn Taymiyyan Conceptions of the *fitra*

### 2.1.1 Hanbalī Interpretations of the *Fitra* and God's Covenant

It is appropriate to start off a discussion of the classical *Ahl al-Hadīth* understanding of the verses pertaining to the *fitra* and the Adamic Covenant by mentioning the views of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923). Ibn Taymiyya viewed al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, entitled *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān* ('The Comprehensive Elaboration on the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur'ān'), as being "...the most authentic and ... one of the most outstanding" works of *tafsīr* compiled, because al-Ṭabarī "...narrates the beliefs of the *salaf*, without mentioning any innovated [beliefs] or narrating from untrustworthy sources."<sup>1</sup> With such high praise, it is clear that Ibn Taymiyya viewed al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* as being a primary source of theology and correct understanding of the Qur'ān.

Al-Ṭabarī regards the *fitra* that is referred to in Q. 30:30 as a reference to the 'model' (*sun‘a*) that God fashioned man upon, and says that this is the religion of Islam. The very first narration that he cites as support of this, from Ibn Zayd (d. 182/798), interprets the *fitra* as being "...the Islam that was with them since God created them all

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"Shahada," *Islamic Studies* 23 (Autumn, 1984), p. 185; *EQ*, s.v. 'Covenant' (G. Bowering); Gwynne, Rosalin W., *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'ān: God's arguments*, pp. 1-24.

<sup>1</sup> See: *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 13, p. 358; and his *An Introduction to the Principles of Tafseer*, tr. Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari (Birmingham: al-Hidaayah Publications, 1993), p. 51. For a critical analysis of the effects of Ibn Taymiyya's reception of al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*, see: Walid A. Saleh, "Preliminary Remarks on the Historiography of *tafsīr* in Arabic: A History of the Book Approach," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 12 (2010), pp. 6-40.

from Adam.” Furthermore, he also relates this concept with that of the *mīthāq* in Q. 7:172.<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on Q. 7:172, al-Ṭabarī quotes a staggering thirty-three narrations, from Companions such as ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Ubayy b. Ka‘b and Ibn ‘Abbās, and Successors such as Mujāhid, Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, al-Ḍahhāk b. Muzāḥim, ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ, al-Suddī and Muḥammad b. Ka‘b al-Quraḍī. Combined, these narrations offer a majestic image of God rubbing His (right?) Hand on the back of Adam (or, according to other narrations, merely extracted from the loins of Adam), near the sacred plain of Arafat, and extracting from him all of his seed (or his progeny) that would follow him until the Day of Judgment. He then collected these souls (which, we are informed, were not yet in their physical bodies) in front of Him as one audience, and addressed them directly, asking, “Am I not your Lord?” to which they collectively responded, “Yes, you are!” It was also at this juncture – according to al-Ṭabarī – that God determined (or identified) whom from these descendants would be destined for Heaven, and whom for Hell.<sup>2</sup> Al-Ṭabarī quotes Ibn ‘Abbās expressing this Covenant as being embodied in the *fīṭra* that God created mankind upon.<sup>3</sup>

In al-Ṭabarī’s *Tafsīr*, there is one clear and decisive interpretation: the Covenant with Adam was an actual physical occurrence enacted after Adam’s fall to Earth, in

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<sup>1</sup> Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Maṭba‘a Muṭafa Babī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.) vol. 21, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> While each of these narrations obviously only mentions parts of these details, and a more critical and detailed research is certainly warranted on this issue, the key point for our chapter is that all of al-Ṭabarī’s narrations join almost seamlessly together to paint a grand narrative of a primordial scene where God speaks to all of the souls of mankind. See: al-Ṭabarī, *ibid*, vol. 9, pp. 110-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, vol. 9, p. 115.

which God reaffirmed and mankind acknowledged that He is the only true God. The *fīṭra*, for al-Ṭabarī, internally and subconsciously represents that *mīthāq*.

Another early authority who commented on the notion of the *fīṭra* is Ibn Qutayba al-Daynūrī (d. 276/889).<sup>1</sup> In explaining the ḥadīth “Every child is born on the *fīṭra*...”, Ibn Qutayba quotes Ḥammād b. Salama (d. 167/783) as saying that this was referring to the Covenant that was extracted from them while they were in the loins of their forefathers.<sup>2</sup> Ibn Qutayba then comments that what Ḥammād meant by this is Q. 7:172, and states,

...and so you shall not find anyone except that he admits that he has a Creator and Sustainer, even if he calls Him by another name or worships other than Him in order to get to Him, or describes Him in a manner that is not [befitting] Him.<sup>3</sup>

He then proceeds to clarify that the *fīṭra* upon which every child is born is nothing other than the acceptance of God as His Creator. He claims that the Mu‘tazilīs consider the *fīṭra* to be the religion of Islam itself, and that this is problematic,<sup>4</sup> but “...for us, the *fīṭra* is accepting and knowing God, not the religion of Islam.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For Ibn Qutayba, see: Ishāq Musa Husaynī, *The Life and Works of Ibn Qutayba* (Beirut: American University Press, 1950). For an example of Ibn Qutayba’s attempt to defend traditionalism, see Michael Cook’s “Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999), pp. 43–74.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Daynūrī, *Islāḥ Ghalaṭ Abī ‘Ubayd*, p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> He does not elaborate here on these problems; however, al-‘Ukbarī, a later theologian, does elaborate on some of these ‘problems’, as we shall quote below.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Ibn Taymiyya was an avid reader of al-Daynūrī’s works and praised them highly. He even called al-Daynūrī, “...the orator (*khatib*) of *Ahl al-Sunna*.<sup>1</sup> In particular, Ibn Taymiyya was clearly cognizant of Ibn Qutayba’s interpretation of the *fīṭra*, as he quotes him directly in the *Dar’*.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim (d. 287/900), an early Ḥanbalī theologian, has an entire chapter in his theological work *Kitāb al-Sunna* entitled, “*Regarding the Covenant that God took from His Servants.*”<sup>3</sup> In it, he lists over half a dozen narrations that mention God extracting Adam’s progeny from Adam’s loins, and then questioning them rhetorically about His existence. The chapter preceding this one mentions Prophetic traditions referencing children being born upon the pre-determined plan of God.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of the Adamic *mīthāq* became so widespread by the third Islamic century that the most famous creedal work of this era, the *Creed* of al-Ṭahāwī (d. 321/935), lists belief in the Covenant that God took from Adam as a fundamental pillar of faith.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another Ḥanbalī predecessor of Ibn Taymiyya, and one whom he considered a theological authority,<sup>6</sup> Ibn Baṭṭa al-‘Ukbarī (d. 387/997),<sup>1</sup> spent considerable time

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū’ Fatāwa*, vol. 17, pp. 391-2.

<sup>2</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 8, p. 360.

<sup>3</sup> See: Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ‘Amr b. Abī ‘Āṣim, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, ed. Bāsim al-Jawābira (Dār al-Ṣumayī, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 156-162.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, *Kitāb al-Sunna*, vol. 1, pp. 149-155.

<sup>5</sup> See: William Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), p. 51. Note, however, that al-Ṭahāwī makes no mention of the *fīṭra* in his Creed.

<sup>6</sup> Or, to be more precise, ‘...one of those who wrote extensively on Sunna’ by which he means, as the context shows, theological issues. See: Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū’ a al-Rasā’il al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, p. 168.

collecting the numerous narrations regarding the *fitra* and *mīthāq*.<sup>2</sup> He mentions that some Mu'tazilīs grossly misunderstood these traditions, claiming they refer to a child being born Muslim, and that his non-Muslim parents change this original religion to another; al-'Ukbarī points out that this meaning is not tenable in light of the fact that this implies a child of non-Muslim parents who died in infancy would effectively not be permitted a burial in the graveyard of his faith, or be allowed to confer his inheritance on his non-Muslim relatives, as Islamic law forbids this on the Muslim. Yet, there is unanimous agreement that such a child can and will be buried in the graveyard of his people's faith, and that his inheritance, if he has any, will be rightfully inherited by his non-Muslim relatives.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the meaning of *fitra* is in fact the Covenant that is referred to in Q. 7:172, which is to say that the *fitra* is the innate belief of every soul in the existence of a Lord and the perfection of His Lordship (*rubūbiyya*).<sup>4</sup>

Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. 425/1034), in his Qur'ānic lexicon *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, echoes a similar position when he defines the *fitra* as a knowledge that God has

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<sup>1</sup> For his life and theology, see the seminal, although outdated, work of Henri Laoust, *La Profession de foi d'Ibn Baṭṭa* (Damascus: Institut Francais De Damas, 1958), esp. pp. xlii - liv. Note that Laoust did not have access to some of Ibn Baṭṭa's works that have only recently been published in the last decade.

<sup>2</sup> See: 'Ubayd Allah b. Muhammad ibn Baṭṭa al-'Ukbarī, *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya*, ed. Walīd b. Muḥammad b. Sayf Naṣr (Riyāḍ: Dār al-Rayah, 1998), vol. 3, p. 298; and his *Kitāb al-qadr*, ed. 'Uthmān 'Abd Allah al-Ithyūbī (Riyāḍ, Dār al-Rayah, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 295-319, and vol. 2, pp. 146-8. Ibn Taymiyya quotes from Ibn Baṭṭa and his definition of the *fitra* in *DT*, vol. 8, p. 360.

<sup>3</sup> There are other legal issues that can be raised from the theological doctrine of the *fitra*. For one such discussion, from the works of Ibn Ḥazm, see: Adang, Camilla, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fitra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *Qantara* 21:2 (2000), pp. 403-8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Baṭṭa, *Kitāb al-Qadr*, vol. 2, p. 72.

ingrained and planted in man. This knowledge, he says, is what is referred to when even those who reject Islam acknowledge God as their Creator.<sup>1</sup>

Another early commentator on the issue of the Covenant and *fīṭra* was Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071).<sup>2</sup> He is especially important for our discussion since it shall be shown that he had a particularly strong influence on Ibn Taymiyya’s views (which is not surprising, giving the fact that Ibn Taymiyya considered him “...the most knowledgeable person from the scholars of Andalus with regards to the statements of the *salaf*”<sup>3</sup>). In his lengthy commentary on the ḥadīth of the *fīṭra*,<sup>4</sup> he states that people have differed over the interpretation of the *fīṭra*. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, the *fīṭra* represents a knowledge (*ma’rifa*) that God has implanted in the soul of every child, without exception. This knowledge is unique to humankind, being absent from animals, and will lead a child, once he or she comes of age, to recognize his or her Lord as being the true God, and ultimately – when adhered to – towards submission to Him.<sup>5</sup> This *fīṭra* represents the pure state of man – and this is why the Prophet compared such an

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *Mufradāt al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* p. 640. The theology of al-Rāghib still needs to be studied; however, his writings seem to indicate that he was influenced by the classical *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*. For more on his literary achievements, see: Joseph Sadan, “An Admirable and Ridiculous Hero: Some Notes on the Bedouin in Medieval Arabic Belles Lettres, on a Chapter of *Adab* by al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, and on a Literary Model in Which Admiration and Mockery Coexist,” *Poetics Today* 10:3 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 471-492.

<sup>2</sup> For a reason that is not apparent to me, it seems scant research has been done amongst Western circles on this towering figure of Andalusian Islam. For an overview of his life and theology, see: Şāliḥ b. ‘Abd Allah al-Ghuṣn, *‘Aqīda al-Imām Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr fī al-tawḥīd wa-l-īmān* (Riyāḍ: Dār al-‘Āsimah, 1996).

For a brief, and somewhat incomplete, discussion on Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s views on the *fīṭra*, see: M. Yasien, “The Interpretations of *Fīṭrah*,” pp. 134-5. Yasien incorrectly assumes that Ibn Taymiyya disagrees with Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s notions of the *fīṭra*; however, as I will show in the next section, the two views are so consistent as to actually indicate that Ibn Taymiyya was heavily influenced by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s interpretations.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 7/57.

<sup>4</sup> His commentary runs almost fifty pages of print. See his *al-Tamhīd lima fī Muwaṭṭa min al-ma’ānī wa-l-asānīd*, ed. Usāma b. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Faruq, 1996), vol. 6, p. 349-397.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 355-6.

untouched, pure state with an animal that is born unmutilated, and shall remain unmutilated, until its owners mutilate it.<sup>1</sup>

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr strenuously rejects the Mu‘tazilī interpretation of the *fīṭra* as constituting the religion of Islam since the religion entails actions and beliefs that a child cannot have. Rather, he links this *fīṭra* to the *mīthāq* (Q. 7:172), and references statements from earlier authorities that mention God’s speaking to all of mankind.<sup>2</sup> He also rejects, as the interpretation of ‘deviant groups’, those who deny that God actually extracted all of mankind and spoke to them on grounds that this was impossible and illogical.<sup>3</sup> As far as Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr is concerned, the texts are unequivocally clear: each and every soul had been extracted by God, and made to verbally testify in front of Him, which they did, based on their *fīṭra*-endowed knowledge of the Creator.

Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 598/1202),<sup>4</sup> perhaps the most important Ḥanbalī of his generation,<sup>5</sup> also interpreted the *fīṭra* as being a model upon which God created all of mankind. He rejects the interpretation that the *fīṭra* is the religion of Islam, and instead

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<sup>1</sup> The reference to mutilation deals with the type of ‘branding’ that pre-Islamic Arabs would do to mark their animals. Rather than brand with a hot iron, the Arabs would slit the ears or face of the animal with a sharp knife, leaving a distinct pattern that would be recognizable to all. In the hadith, the *fīṭra* is compared to a new-born that does not have any such mutilations, and then the owners mutilate the baby, meaning society corrupts and mutilates the *fīṭra*. If the new-born were left alone, it would not have such markings, and thus remain pure ‘...on the *fīṭra*’. See: *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol 6, pp. 359-63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 368. He claims that these are not the opinion of the scholars who are within the *Jamā‘a*, the ‘Group’ that is referenced as being the Saved Sect in Prophetic literature. This is a significant point, as, later, Ibn Taymiyya will state this very position that Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr deems heretical.

<sup>4</sup> For Ibn al-Jawzī, see: Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzī’s Kitāb Akhbār as-Ṣifāt*, pp. 3-32 (Brill, Leiden: 2002), and Stefan Leder, *Ibn al-Gauzī und seine Kompilation Wider Die Leidenschaft* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 1984), pp. 15-42.

<sup>5</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya’s views on Ibn al-Jawzī, see: *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 169.

quotes Ibn Quṭayba, claiming that it is the acknowledgment of God's existence.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the verses pertaining to the Adamic Covenant, he quoted the narration from Ibn ‘Abbās that al-Ṭabarī recorded previously, without making mention of any alternative hypothesis. He, too, affirms a literal reading of the extraction of all men from the loins of Adam.<sup>2</sup>

From all of the preceding quotations, it is safe to conclude that the dominant and uncontested interpretation in pre-Taymiyyan Ḥanbalī scholarship was the understanding that God undertook an actual verbal Covenant from Adam and his progeny, and that this Covenant entailed recognizing the existence and Lordship of God.<sup>3</sup> It is equally clear that the predominant interpretation of the *fitra* (*sans* al-Ṭabarī) is that it is some type of inherent knowledge, but not quite yet the actual religion of

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī, *Zād al-Masīr fī ‘ilm al-Tafsīr* (Damasus: al-Maktab al-Islamī, 1987), vol. 6, pp. 300-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 283-5.

<sup>3</sup> Wadad Kadi's interpretation of these events is slightly different, as she understands Sunnī theologians positing a third existence of man, between his temporary sojourn in Heaven and his wordly existence. She also links these two verses (viz., the verse of the *fitra*, and the verse of the Covenant) with a third, and that is the 'Verse of the Trust' in Q. 33:72. In my readings of early Sunnī *tafsīrs*, I was not able to find evidence for her interpretations or connection between these verses, hence even if some Ṣūfī or Shī‘ī interpretations do exist, I feel it is a bit of a stretch to paint as broad a picture as she has. See: Kadi, Wadad, "The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qur’ān," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147:4 (Dec 2003), p. 333, and pp. 336-7.

This section of course concentrated on Ḥanbalite interpretation; there is an entire genre of Ṣūfī interpretation which, while worthy of study, is not directly related to our topic. One such figure whose interpretation of the *mīthāq* and *yawm al-aṣṭ* has been studied in great detail is that of Sahl al-Tustarī (see: G. Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, pp.145-57). Tustarī affirms four primordial events before the creation of man. Firstly, the human race issues forth from the light of Muhammad; secondly, this race is extracted from the prophetic stereotypes and exists in the form of specks endowed with intellects; thirdly, at this stage God enacts the primordial covenant with the prophets; and, lastly, God summons mankind from the loins of the prophetic prototypes and addresses them with the *aṣṭ* question. See: *ibid.*, pp. 156-7. Another work that deals with a Ṣūfīc interpretation, this time of Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid's younger brother, is: Gramlich, Richard, *Der reine Gottesglaube: Das Wort des Einheitsbekenntnisses* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983). For this younger al-Ghazālī, the profession of God's Unity is the beginning and end of human existence, as manifested on *yawm al-aṣṭ*; it was on that day that God's elect were chosen, and they alone replied in the affirmative. See: *ibid.*, pp. 23-6.

There has also been a thorough study done of Ibn Ḥazm's views on the *fitra*. Ibn Ḥazm sees the *fitra* as being synonymous with the religion of Islam, which was also the interpretation of al-Ṭabarī above. See: C. Adang, "Islam as the Inborn Religion of Mankind: The Concept of *Fitra* in the Works of Ibn Ḥazm," *Qantara* 21, no. 2 (2000): 396-99. The theology of Ibn Ḥazm is worthy of independent study, for he cannot easily be classified into any of the major groups. He combines elements of Ḥanbalism and Mu'tazilism, but is vociferously anti-Ash'arī.

Islam. Only al-Ṭabarī claimed that the *fitra* is precisely synonymous with the actual religion of Islam. For all of the other theologians and authors mentioned, the *fitra* is understood as a type of knowledge that informs man of the existence and perfection of God, but cannot, in and of itself, confer a detailed knowledge of Islam's pillars and principles.

It is useful to point out that none of these earlier theologians developed a systematic theory of the *fitra*, nor did they attempt to discuss its relationship with the human soul and intellect. All of this was something undertaken by Ibn Taymiyya in his writings, without prior precedent.

### 2.1.2 The *kalām* Interpretation of the *fitra* and God's Covenant

Having examined the Ḥanbalī notions of the *fitra*, it is also essential to consider Ash'arī works in view to properly situate both al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya. Perusing the printed works of early Ash'arī authorities, it seems that they did not accord much significance to the notion of *fitra*.<sup>1</sup> Both al-Bāqillānī<sup>2</sup> and al-Juwainī<sup>3</sup> seem not to mention this notion in their primary theological works, and in fact explicitly state that knowledge of God's existence is *not* innate, but rather one that must be derived through

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<sup>1</sup> See: Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Disposition' (*Fitra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Farābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 102 (Jan., 2012), p. 4. Griffel states that earlier Ash'arīs did not discuss the notion of human *fitra* – however this is not completely accurate, as al-Bayhaqī does present his interpretations of the *fitra* traditions, as we shall see.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Bāqillānī, al-Qādī Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib, *Kitāb tamhīd al-awā'il wa talkhiṣ al-dalā'il*, ed. ʻImād al-Dīn Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1993), p. 26, where he discusses innate knowledge (God's existence not being listed among these), and p. 43 where he discusses the necessity of proving God's existence via inspection and rational inquiry. Also see: B. Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20:1 (1993), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Juwainī, *al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 120.

rational inquiry, the very first obligation of the one who comes of legal age (*mukallaf*) according to Ash‘arī theology.

Al-Bayhaqī,<sup>1</sup> another early Ash‘arī, was clearly aware of the entire corpus of traditions regarding the *fitra*.<sup>2</sup> However, there is no mention in his writings of any innate knowledge that this *fitra* might provide. Instead, for him, the *fitra* is God’s predetermination of which children will eventually go to Heaven, and which to Hell. The Covenant with Adam (*mīthāq*), he states, was not one enacted with the entirety of mankind, but rather only with those from mankind whom He knew and had predetermined would believe in Him. Al-Bayhaqī states that some assert this Covenant was with all of the Children of Adam; if this is true, he says, then the only legitimate interpretation would be that God willed some of them to respond willingly (*taw‘an*), and others unwillingly (*karhan*). Those who responded willingly would eventually believe, and those who responded unwillingly would eventually reject faith.<sup>3</sup> Al-Bayhaqī is clearly aware that some have interpreted the *fitra* to mean that children are born with an innate knowledge of God’s Lordship, and he quotes numerous earlier authorities

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<sup>1</sup> The Ash‘arism of al-Bayhaqī has already been referenced in Chapter One of this dissertation; there, it was pointed out that al-Bayhaqī represents a minority and now non-existent strain of Ash‘arism which was a middle path between al-Juwainī’s – and, subsequently, al-Ghazālī’s – philosophically influenced thought, and the methodology of the early *Ahl al-Hadīth*. In this summarized discussion of the *fitra*, we see this tension once again: he is fully aware of Ḥanbalī understandings of the *fitra*, even quoting them faithfully, with their evidences. However, he prefers another interpretation which is more rationalist and which will eventually come to represent the ‘standard’ Ash‘arī view. This only serves to highlight the need for yet more work to be done on the early development and eventual canonization of Ash‘arī theology.

<sup>2</sup> He quotes many of the traditions that his contemporary Ḥanbalīs quoted. See: Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-qadā’ wa-l-qadar*, ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allah Āl ‘Amir (Riyāḍ: Maktaba al-‘Ubaykān, 2000), pp. 140–142 and pp. 337–352.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

that state this opinion.<sup>1</sup> However, he does not consider this opinion to be the soundest, claiming that the true meaning of these traditions is that God created mankind upon a disposition that is already known to Him: some will go to Heaven because of this disposition, and others will go to Hell.<sup>2</sup> Thus, for al-Bayhaqī, the traditions of *fitra* are related to the issue of God's predetermining (*qadar*) of the people of Heaven and Hell, and have nothing to do with a knowledge of a Creator or a disposition to the religion of Islam.

Al-Ghazālī's understanding of the *fitra* has been the subject of a detailed study.<sup>3</sup> For him, the *fitra* does not in itself provide any knowledge; rather, the true *fitra* forces man to question what is true, and thus leads to a rational quest for ultimate truths, all the while providing him with a set of universal judgments by which to grasp the veracity of these truths. On occasion, he seems to use the word synonymously with '*aql*', but his primary usage suggests that the *fitra* can also be mistaken, and consequently is in need of correction by the intellect. Therefore, in al-Ghazālī's understanding, the '*aql*' is the one true and ultimate source of knowledge, and the *fitra* is subservient to it.<sup>4</sup>

There is one interesting reference in al-Ghazālī's writings, however, to the knowledge of God being ingrained in the *fitra*. In his *Iḥyā'*, he mentions, almost in

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<sup>1</sup> In particular, he quotes Ahmad b. Ubayd, al-Mu'allā b. Ziyād, Ash'ath, and Mubārak b. Fuḍāla. See: *ibid.*, pp. 343-4. Towards the end of his work (pp. 360-1), he summarizes what will essentially become Ibn Taymiyya's position (viz., that the *fitra* represents a type of belief in God), but only after he has offered his own opinion, and by prefacing this remark by saying, "And there is another opinion as well, which has been mentioned by Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī..." but then concludes this opinion by stating, "...but there is no possible way of claiming that a child has [actual] faith, and God knows best" *ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 360. He attributes this to a number of earlier authorities, such as Mālik and al-Shāfi'i.

<sup>3</sup> See: Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Disposition' (*Fitra*) and its Background in the Teachings of al-Farābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102 (Jan., 2012), pp. 1-32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7, p. 28. Griffel correctly points out that al-Ghazālī was influenced by both al-Farābī and Ibn Sīna in this understanding.

passing, that the ‘*fitra* of the intellect’ (*fitra al-‘uqūl*)<sup>1</sup> does inform mankind of God’s existence; however, he immediately proceeds to clarify that such a knowledge is not sufficient on its own because, in order to make clear the truth (*istiṣḥār*), and since one must follow past scholars, it is essential to prove God’s existence rationally, which, for him, is done via proving the createdness of accidents (viz., the *dalīl*).<sup>2</sup> Thus, while al-Ghazālī is aware of and mentions in passing the standard Ḥanbalī position that Ibn Taymiyya adopts, it does not seem to play any significance in his theology.

Proceeding in chronological order, the next *mutakallim*, albeit Mu’tazilī, of import that weighed in on this issue is al-Zamakhsharī. Al-Zamakhsharī, commenting on Q. 30:30, quotes the ḥadīth tradition of every child having been born on the *fitra*, and explains this as God having created man accepting His Oneness and the religion of Islam, since it acts in harmony with the intellect (*mujāwib al-‘aql*), and is the natural consequence of rational inquiry (*musāwiq al-naẓar*), such that, were they left to themselves, they would not choose any religion over Islam.<sup>3</sup> For the Mu’tazilī al-Zamakhsharī, the *fitra* is what rational inquiry leads to, and while it is innately placed in man, it does not in itself result in knowledge of God. Rather, it works in tandem with man’s rational faculties, and requires rational inquiry to validate its findings. This, of

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<sup>1</sup> It is particularly interesting that for al-Ghazālī, even this partial affirmation of the epistemological role of the *fitra* had to be linked to the intellect.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā ‘ulūm al-dīn*, vol. 1, p. 118. As far as I can tell, this seems to be the only explicit mention in al-Ghazālī’s writings of the *fitra* in connection with God’s existence.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Kashshāf, vol. 3, pp. 484-5.

course, dovetails perfectly with the standard Mu'tazilī position that knowledge of God must be sought via rational inquiry, and that it is not innate in man.<sup>1</sup>

With regards to the Adamic Covenant in Q. 7:172, al-Zamakhsharī is explicit in that the entire incident must be considered a parable, allegorical in nature (*tamthīl wa-takhyīl*).<sup>2</sup> This *mīthāq*, for al-Zamakhsharī, is not a verbal testimony or a physical extraction of Adam's progeny, but rather a representation of the numerous rational evidences (*dalā'il 'aqliyya*) that God has provided for His servants in order to manifest His Existence and Unicity. These evidences are so clear that it is *as if* God questioned the children of Adam and caused them to admit to the truth of 'Am I not your Lord?' In fact, al-Zamkhsharī states, this type of metaphorical language is a hallmark of the Qur'ān and pre-Islamic poetry, a claim he proceeds to illustrate with examples.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Ghazālī was not the only Ash'arī to mention the concept of *fīṭra* only in passing; al-Rāzī seems to gloss over the whole notion in the corpus of his writings. Perhaps the only place where he explicitly mentions it is in his *Tafsīr al-kabīr*, where as a matter of course, he needs to explain the Qur'ānic reference to it (Q. 30:30). He writes that the *fīṭra*:<sup>4</sup>

...is monotheism (*tawḥīd*), for God imprinted man (*faṭara al-nās*) with it when He took them out of the back of Adam ... and this unicity [of God] is ingrained (*mutarāsikha*) in them, without change, so much so that if you asked them who

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<sup>1</sup> The author of *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamṣa* states, "And our position is that God is not known by necessity, but rather this knowledge must be acquired." See. Ibn Abī Ḥashim, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Khamṣa li-l Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār*, pp. 51-2; Sherman Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), p. 49; B. Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20:1 (1993), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 9, pp. 98-9.

created the Heavens and earth, they would say, ‘Allah’. However, this imprinted faith (*al-īmān al-fitrī*) is not sufficient.

However, while al-Rāzī does mention this imprinted knowledge as a possible interpretation of the *fīṭra*, he proceeds to claim that there is another interpretation, which is that the meaning of *fīṭra* is God’s complete control over His creation. Although he does not state clearly which opinion he prefers, the wording suggests that the second opinion is the one that resounds with him more.<sup>1</sup>

It is poignant to mention that, unlike almost every other Sunnī Qur’ānic commentator preceding him, al-Rāzī does not mention any of the Prophetic traditions regarding the *fīṭra* or the *mīthāq*; moreover, his commentary on this verse seems particularly sparse.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Rāzī’s theological writings, like those of the Ash’arīs before him, do not mention any direct reference to the notion of *fīṭra* in the sections affirming God’s existence. On occasion, though, he does appeal to some notion of an inherent knowledge of God’s power.<sup>3</sup>

Regarding the *mīthāq*, al-Rāzī mentions that people have understood this in one of two ways. Traditionalists (*Ahl al-Athār*) and scholars of exegesis, he says, have taken

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> The commentary on this verse is barely one paragraph long. As a comparison, regarding the story of Abraham in Q. 6:70, al-Rāzī has many tangential discussions reaching a few dozen pages.

<sup>3</sup> The example that he uses is the fact that Muslims and non-Muslims all turn to God and beseech Him at times of distress, which “...proves that the *fīṭra aṣlīyya* attests that the Lord of the world has power of all things and knows that which is secret and hidden.” See: al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-‘Aliyya*, vol. 3, p. 164; and B. Abrahamov, “Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20:1 (1993), p. 26. Note that Abrahamov extrapolated from this one quote the conclusion that al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya have similar understandings of what ‘necessary knowledge’ entails (see: *ibid.*, p. 30), yet in light of al-Rāzī’s other writings, this does not appear to be a feasible conclusion.

the verse as signifying an actual Covenant with all of mankind that took place after Adam was created; the Mu'tazilīs, on the other hand, rejected these interpretations, for twelve reasons, which he lists in extensive detail. The second interpretation of this incident, which he ascribes to the 'People of Rational Thought' (*ashāb al-naẓar*) and the 'Masters of Intellectual Discourse' (*arbāb al-ma'qūlāt*),<sup>1</sup> is that this verse simply implies that God extracted every generation from the loins of the previous one, and created them in the most perfect manner. The testimony referred to in the verse (viz., 'Am I not your Lord?'), al-Rāzī says, need not be interpreted literally, for the Qur'ān and the Arabic language is full of poetic language ascribing speech to inanimate objects. As examples, al-Rāzī quotes precisely the same verses and poetic couplets that al-Zamakhsharī did before him.<sup>2</sup>

For al-Rāzī, the verse of the *mīthāq* references the fact that God has implanted in man the necessary tools to examine His evidences, and to know monotheism, to such an extent that it was as if they testified with their tongues: "Yes! You are our Lord." Al-Rāzī also claims that a Covenant must be taken from an intelligent, rational being; and the souls, at this stage, were not capable of testifying. And this interpretation, al-Rāzī writes, has not been criticized since it is beyond reproach, conforming both with the text of the Qur'ān and reason.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This must, by extrapolation, be a reference to the Ash'arīs, since he has already mentioned the Mu'tazilī and Ḥanbalī position in the previous opinion.

<sup>2</sup> A simple comparison of the two paragraphs shows the obvious cut-and-paste that al-Rāzī did. See: *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, p. 400 and compare with al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, p. 400. He later states that were one to accept the first interpretation, this too would be permissible (*ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 402). Thus, while he himself clearly leans towards the second interpretation, he did not feel that the first opinion should be completely dismissed. Al-Rāzī also uses this incident to refute the Mu'tazilī understanding of pre-destination, and affirm the Sunnī position of God's foreknowledge and predetermination of man's actions. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 398.

While al-Rāzī does not explicitly mention the *fitra* in this section, his brief connecting of the *mīthāq* with monotheism shows that he did not dismiss it either. In other writings, al-Rāzī appears to use the term *fitra* as signifying man's internal and unacquired ability to detect certain feelings, such as pain and pleasure.<sup>1</sup> Whatever his views might be in respect to the *fitra* and *mīthāq*, it is clear that for al-Rāzī a certain knowledge of God's existence *cannot* be acquired except through rational introspection.<sup>2</sup>

What is especially interesting, though, is the fact that al-Rāzī essentially agrees with al-Zamakhsharī's symbolic interpretation of the verse of the Covenant, and uses the same evidences to demonstrate this. And what will prove to be even more perplexing is that Ibn Taymiyya, in essence, ends up opposing the predecessors of his own theological school and agreeing with his opponents on this issue, as the next section will demonstrate.

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<sup>1</sup> al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Muhaṣṣal*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

## 2.2 Ibn Taymiyya's Epistemological *Fitra*-Revolution

Analyzing Ibn Taymiyya's views on the *fitra* is not an easy task. This is because, while he references the notion of *fitra* many dozens of times in the *Dar'*, not to mention his other works, he did not compile a structured and dedicated work on the topic. Therefore, one can only extrapolate Ibn Taymiyya's views by piecing together the many references he makes to the notion of the *fitra*, analyzing the contexts of these various references and Ibn Taymiyya's reason for using it.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this section, therefore, is to provide a more complete picture regarding Ibn Taymiyya's conception of the *fitra*. What emerges is a remarkably

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<sup>1</sup> The task of locating every reference to the *fitra* was a challenging one; as I have alluded to, Ibn Taymiyya references the *fitra* more than one hundred times in the *Dar'* alone, yet he has not written a separate treatise detailing his views on it. In my own readings of the *Dar'*, I attempted to record every reference Ibn Taymiyya makes to this word. Additionally, since this topic has been of interest to me for some years, I had collected other references within Ibn Taymiyya's writings (in particular, those preserved in the *Majmū' al-Fatawā*). Lastly, the help of computer search programs was also sought, but this proved problematic insofar as the fact that these programs give many errors and also yield terms irrelevant to the topic (for example, it also yields every word beginning in *t-r* that has the clausal *fa* attached to it, such as the common phrase *fātarhu al-su'āl*, [...so asking this question'], or *fātarīqā* [...so the way of...']). The reason I point this out is that, while I claim at having done a thorough examination of Ibn Taymiyya's views of the *fitra* in his *Dar'* to the best of my ability, I also need to emphasize the possibility of having missed some quotes that others may yet find and from which perhaps alternative or supplementary understandings of the *fitra* may emerge. Nonetheless, and as the quantity of quotes in this section will hopefully demonstrate, I feel confident in stating that this section does represent the principal interpretations and role that Ibn Taymiyya designated to the *fitra*.

It is useful to note that there is one section in the *Dar'* where Ibn Taymiyya discusses the concept of the *fitra* in great detail: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 358-468. Also note that there is a treatise in the *Majmū'a al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā* entitled *Risāla fī-l-kalām 'alā al-fitra wa ma'rifat Allah*; however, this is not a treatise authored by Ibn Taymiyya, but rather a collection of quotes and opinions by a certain Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Munabijī who does include some quotes from Ibn Taymiyya, but these are without any reference to the original writings that he extracts these from. Additionally, this treatise does not provide any new material from what I have referenced directly from the *Dar'* and *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*. See: *Majmū'a al-Rasā'il al-Kubrā*, pp. 315-335.

Also it is worthy of note that Ibn Taymiyya quotes directly and extensively from Ibn 'Abd al-Barr's work *al-Tamhīd*, approving his interpretations of the *fitra* and commenting on them. See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 366-390, and p. 417. M. Yasien concludes, after referencing Ibn 'Abd al-Barr and other scholars from the traditionalists, that "...Ibn Taymiyyah ... has remained remarkably faithful to the traditional interpretations of the relevant passages on the *fitra* in the Qur'ān and hadith. [His] views accord fully with those of other orthodox scholars..." See: M. Yasien, "The Interpretations of *Fitrah*," p. 148.

Ovamir Anjum has also done some research on Ibn Taymiyya's notion of the *fitra*, especially its ramifications in Islamic political science. See: Anjum, Ovamir, *Politics, Law and Community in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 215 – 32. I have benefitted from some of his terminologies and ideas.

consistent and well-thought out epistemological and psychological faculty that dovetails perfectly with Ibn Taymiyya's criticisms of the *kalām* proofs for the existence of God, and provides a powerful alternative to these proofs, rendering them, in effect, superfluous. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya was able to utilize his multi-faceted theory to bolster his views on human morality, psychology, and cognition. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it provided Ibn Taymiyya with a supra-rational source of authentication that effectively limited the role of the human intellect and acted as a verifying agent for what was and was not legitimate rational thought. With this, he was able to accomplish what he had set out to do: limit the perceived rational excesses, under the guise of intellectual proofs, of the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* via a mechanism that was equally accessible to all of mankind, namely the Divinely ingrained and pure *fitra*.

### 2.2.1 The Existence of the Human *fitra*

Ibn Taymiyya argues that the *fitra* is an actuality that can be proven to exist not just from the Sacred Texts, but also from human experience.

In one passage, Ibn Taymiyya invokes three textual references to the *fitra*: firstly, he quotes Q. 30:30 which proves two points, that God created all of His servants on the *fitra*, and that He also sends the prophets with Revelation to affirm this same *fitra*. He posits this because the verse begins by mentioning the *fitra* that man was created upon, and then concludes by mentioning the true religion revealed by God. He follows this verse by quoting the ḥadīth, "Every child is born on the *fitra*, and then his parents make him a Jew, Christian or Magian, just as an animal gives birth to an unbranded animal, so

do you see any animal born branded, until you yourselves brand it?”<sup>1</sup> Lastly, he uses the tradition in which the Prophet quotes God as saying, “I created my servants in a pure form (*ḥunafā’*)<sup>2</sup> but then Satan misguided them, and forbade for them what I had allowed for them, and commanded them to worship others besides Me.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the source of the *fitra* is very clear: for Ibn Taymiyya, God created His servants on the *fitra*,<sup>4</sup> and implanted (*maghrūr*) it in them.<sup>5</sup> This is the framework that God created all of mankind upon, the framework of Islam. Ibn Taymiyya also believes the primordial Adamic Covenant (*mīthāq*) indicates the existence of the *fitra*.<sup>6</sup>

However, Ibn Taymiyya assures his readers that the existence of the *fitra* is not just proven through textual sources. He goes into a somewhat lengthy discussion proving, through rational means, that the *fitra* is embedded in every child. He mentions eight proofs,<sup>7</sup> most of which revolve around the reality of the human situation and

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<sup>1</sup> This tradition is reported by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, The Book of Funerals, ‘Chapter: If a boy embraces Islam’, vol. 2, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> The term *ḥanif* is used many times in the Qur’ān, almost always to apply to the methodology of the Prophet Abraham. It has generally been understood in classical sources to mean ‘one who turns away from idolatry and towards the worship of God’; there has also been a significant amount of modern research regarding possible parallels of this word in other languages and faith traditions. See: *EI2*, s.v. ‘Ḥanīf’ (W. Montgomery Watt); de Blois, François, “Naṣrānī and ḥanīf: Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam,” *BSOAS* 65:1 (2002), pp. 1-30; F. Griffel, “The Harmony of Natural Law and *Shari‘a*,” p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> This tradition is reported by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the Book of Paradise and Its Blessings, Chapter: Characteristics by which the Inhabitants of Paradise can be Distinguished from the Inhabitants of Hell in this World, vol. 4, p. 162.

See: *DT*, vol. 6, pp. 67-8; also, in *DT*, vol. 9, pp. 374-5 he quotes all of these texts together as well.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 377; *Majmū’ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, 10/244.

<sup>6</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 220; also see *DT*, vol. 9, p. 330.

In the next section, we shall see how precise Ibn Taymiyya was when he claims that the *mīthāq* indicates the existence of the *fitra*. For most Sunnī authorities, these two terms are different notions; for Ibn Taymiyya, they are one and the same.

<sup>7</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 457-468.

psyche. For example, he says that it is known by necessity that every human has beliefs and desires. These beliefs are sometimes true and sometimes false; likewise, his desires are sometimes beneficial and sometimes harmful. And if a person were to be presented with the option of having correct beliefs and beneficial desires, he would intrinsically opt to always have correct beliefs and beneficial desires – even without an external factor informing him of this. Therefore, there is clearly within man an indication of a *fitra* that wishes good for its possessor.<sup>1</sup>

Another indication of the existence of the *fitra*, argues Ibn Taymiyya, is that man yearns for higher ideals. Bodily pleasures and animalistic instincts do not make up the sum total of humanity. Even though man has been conditioned to love food, drink and many other matters, the *fitra* requires man to go beyond these sensual pleasures, for the soul will continue to yearn for something to worship and a higher goal to strive to, and something to find complete comfort in.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the soul's need for spiritual sustenance is greater than the body's need for food, and this need is a part of the *fitra* that God created mankind with.<sup>3</sup> This spiritual sustenance that the soul seeks is the knowledge and worship of God.<sup>4</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya, the existence of the *fitra* is manifested in man's spiritual needs and psychological desires.

Lastly, Ibn Taymiyya argues that a clear manifestation of the existence of the *fitra* is the fact that man turns to God at times of need. Even if, during times of ease, man ignores this urge, during times of distress, his *fitra* forces him to call out to his Creator

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 458.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, vol. 10, pp. 72-3.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 9, p. 374.

<sup>4</sup> N. Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 67.

for help.<sup>1</sup> And this is a phenomenon that can be witnessed amongst all nations and peoples still upon their *fitra*, from the Bedouins, old ladies, and children, and from the Jews, Christians, Muslims, and pagans.<sup>2</sup>

Now that its existence is proven, the question arises as to what the *fitra* represents.

### 2.2.2 The *fitra* and Islam

For Ibn Taymiyya, there is an inherent, divinely-ordained relationship between the *fitra* and the religion of Islam. The essence of the *fitra* is the essence of Islam, meaning submission to Allah. It is for this reason, he points out, that on occasion the term is used by the classical scholars synonymously with the actual religion of Islam.<sup>3</sup> However, Ibn Taymiyya stresses that the *fitra* is *not* synonymous with the religion of Islam, meaning the detailed theology and laws of the *Shari'a*.

In one passage, Ibn Taymiyya mentions that some of the earlier scholars interpreted the *fitra* as being the religion of Islam, and this interpretation has many evidences for it.<sup>4</sup> For example, some narrations mentioned “Every child is born on the religion (*milla*)...”<sup>5</sup> Also, if the meaning of the *fitra* had not been the religion of Islam, why would the Companions ask after hearing it, “What about the children of the

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<sup>1</sup> He quotes a number of verses from the Qur'ān that mentions this phenomenon. See: *DT*, vol. 3, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> As was demonstrated in the previous section, this was the position of al-Ṭabarī and a handful of early Sunnī scholars.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, vol. 22, p. 539.

<sup>5</sup> Meaning: some versions of the ḥadīth have the word ‘religion’ instead of the word *fitra*, thus indicating their synonymous usage.

pagans?”<sup>1</sup> And the Prophet mentioned that his parents “...make him into a Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian,” not “...make him into a Muslim.”<sup>2</sup> Lastly, the Prophet compared a child to a fully-formed, unbranded animal, and this demonstrates that changes occur to the *fitra* after the child is born; such changes can only be the child’s religion.<sup>3</sup>

This does not, Ibn Taymiyya stresses, imply that when a child is born, he already believes in the religion of Islam and professes faith in God;<sup>4</sup> no doubt, God causes children to be born without knowing anything, as He himself mentions in Q. 16:78.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the *fitra* is the purity of the heart, and its willingness to accept the truth, such that if it were left to itself and not corrupted, it would have no other path except that of Islam.<sup>6</sup> In another passage, Ibn Taymiyya explains that the *fitra* is ‘general Islam’, meaning, the acknowledgment of God, and loving and worshipping Him.<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya is fully aware that it is impossible to argue that *fitra* provides elaborate knowledge of the religion. He states that the *fitra* knows matters in a generic manner, and the *Shari‘a* explains and elaborates on this generic knowledge. Thus the *Shari‘a* is able to inform of matters that the *fitra* in and of itself would not be capable of

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<sup>1</sup> In the version of al-Bukhārī that has preceded, the Companions asked, after hearing the Prophet say that every child is born on the *fitra*, “But what of the children of the pagans?” Ibn Taymiyya infers from this that the Companions understood the *fitra* to indicate the religion of Islam, hence their question regarding the children of the pagans.

<sup>2</sup> Meaning: the ḥadīth mentions three other faiths that a child born on the *fitra* might potentially be corrupted into, yet it does not mention the religion of Islam. Hence, the *fitra* (at least for these scholars) is synonymous with Islam.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 371-2. He then quotes half a dozen authorities from the *salaf* who held this position; see *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 373-7.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 460.

<sup>5</sup> The verse reads, “And God has caused you to come out of the wombs of your mothers, not knowing anything, and He has blessed you with hearing, and sight, and intellect - little thanks do ye give!” Q. 16:78.

<sup>6</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 247.

<sup>7</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 16, p. 205.

deriving. For example, the *fitra* informs one that God is above and transcendent to the creation; but it is the Qur'ān that informs man that God possesses a Throne and has risen over it.<sup>1</sup> The *fitra* informs mankind of God's existence and some of His Attributes, but it is the Sacred Text that informs him on the details of this.<sup>2</sup>

In one tradition, Ibn Taymiyya states, the Prophet compared the *fitra* to milk, and this dovetails perfectly with the tradition of every child being born on the *fitra*, for every child intrinsically wants milk and yearns to drink it from his mother. Similarly, every child will yearn to know God and worship Him, unless something prevents this from occurring.<sup>3</sup>

Where the *fitra* is interpreted to be the actual religion of Islam, there are a few legal issues that need to be resolved, and Ibn Taymiyya touches upon some of these in his writings. Of these issues is: what is the status of a child born to non-Muslim parents and who subsequently dies in infancy – is the child considered a 'Muslim' for the purposes of inheritance and burial rites?<sup>4</sup> And there is also the theological issue of the fate of such a child in the next life – will he go to Heaven or Hell?<sup>5</sup> Or if a child is orphaned, and his parents were non-Muslims, should the child be raised as a Muslim, or

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 448.

<sup>4</sup> Since a detailed discussion of this point is not relevant to the this section, suffice to point out here that Ibn Taymiyya does not give such a child the legal status of a Muslim. See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 361-2.

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Taymiyya quotes some positions that say that all such children are going to Heaven, or that they are going to Hell, but then concludes that such children will be tested, as adults, on Judgment Day, based on a tradition of the Prophet. See *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 398-401 and pp. 433-436

according to the religion of his parents?<sup>1</sup> Lastly, Ibn Taymiyya mentions that while technically it is conceivable that someone is forced to acknowledge Islam (i.e., forced to outwardly convert), it is inconceivable that the *fitra* is forced into acknowledging God.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.2.3 The *fitra* and the Prophetic Messages

Since the *fitra* is ‘general Islam’<sup>3</sup> for Ibn Taymiyya, it follows that it transcends the message of any one prophet, and in fact embraces all of the prophetic messages and Divine Revelations. This is precisely what Ibn Taymiyya posits.

He writes, “The message of the prophets, all of them, is in conformity to the *fitra* and cannot be in opposition to it.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, the role of the prophets and God’s purpose in sending them is in order to purify the *fitra* from the corruptions of Satan.<sup>5</sup> In another passage, he writes, “... all the Divine communications support and conform with the *fitra*.”<sup>6</sup> Prophets are sent by God to perfect (*takmīl*) the *fitra* and solidify it; it is the hallmark of deviant groups and the enemies of the prophets to distort and change the *fitra*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 390-393. Ibn Taymiyya follows the position that in such a case, the child is raised as a Muslim.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* vol. 8, p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> Meaning: the Islam of all the prophets, which includes believing in God, submitting to Him, and living morally upright lives in accordance with the basic morality that the *fitra* entails, as the next section will show.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 133.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 132 – here he is quoting from al-Shahrastānī. Also see *DT*, vol. 7, p. 400.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 6 p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* vol. 5, p. 260; see also *ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 313, vol. 10, p. 135, vol. 10, p. 466

Ibn Taymiyya mentions that the existence of a prophet is not necessary to bring out what the *fitra* has, just like the presence of food is not necessary for a person to feel hungry. No doubt, he says, the presence of food might elicit hunger, but hunger will exist even in the absence of food. Similarly, the knowledge of God and a desire to submit to Him exists in the soul regardless of extraneous knowledge. And this is the *hanīfiyya* that the Qur’ān calls mankind to.<sup>1</sup>

God’s Revelation, says Ibn Taymiyya, nourishes what is inherent in the *fitra*, and affirms and completes it. Therefore, each and every commandment of God, in fact the entire Revelation, affirms and completes the internal *fitra*.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya writes that the *fitra* is one of the ways that God has blessed mankind, and it is an inherent and internal blessing. But God has also graced man with external blessings that conform with the *fitra*, most importantly the prophets and the Divine Books.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, for Ibn Taymiyya, God created man with an inherent knowledge of Him, and an innate capacity to love Him and submit to Him, and then, out of His Divine Mercy, He complemented that capacity by sending prophets and revealing Books, all of which brings out this knowledge and affirms these tendencies. The *fitra* and the *Shari‘a*, for Ibn Taymiyya, are like a seed and nourishing soil: both are needed in order for one to be a Muslim, and both complement and feed off of one another.

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 451. Also see: F. Griffel, “The Harmony of Natural Law and *Shari‘a*,” p. 43, 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 4, p. 45, and vol. 10, p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwa*, vol. 8, p. 205.

He writes:<sup>1</sup>

“And it is for this reason that the prophets only come with that which will remind the *fitra* of truths that are already known to it, and with [material] that shall strengthen and nourish it, as well as inoculations against matters that deform it. So the prophets, all of them, have been sent to affirm the *fitra* and perfect it, not to change the *fitra* or alter it. Perfection is only attained by the *fitra* that has been completed by the revealed *Shari'a*.”

#### 2.2.4 The *fitra* and the Existence of God

It is by now obvious that of primary importance for Ibn Taymiyya was the epistemological role that the *fitra* played, and in particular, in the knowledge of the existence of God.

For Ibn Taymiyya, acknowledging the existence of God is a matter that is ingrained in the *fitra*, as evidenced by the ḥadīth, “Every child is born on the *fitra*.<sup>2</sup>” Since belief in God is already ingrained in the heart, this clearly demonstrates the speciousness of the Ash'arī position holding that ‘the first obligation upon the one of legal age is to rationalize (*wujūb al-nazar*) [God's existence],’ for there is no need to rationally prove what is already known by necessity.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Taymiyya charges that while al-Rāzī, al-Amidī, and some of the other *mutakallimūn* admit that an innate knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, vol. 16, p. 348.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 328.

of God may be possible, they did not take this possibility seriously, otherwise they would not have needed to formulate such elaborate proofs for God's existence.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the knowledge of God's existence is so soundly incorporated into the *fitra* that it is more apparent than even basic mathematical or physical facts, such as the knowledge of one being half of two, or the knowledge of the impossibility of the same object being present in two different places at the same time. This is because some people might be unaware of such mathematical and physical knowledge, yet it is inconceivable that any *fitra* would turn away from a knowledge of the Divine.<sup>2</sup>

Another illustration of this fact for Ibn Taymiyya is the claim that the existence of God was already known to those whom the Qur'ān addressed; hence there was no need to evidence His existence.<sup>3</sup> That is why, Ibn Taymiyya states, the Qur'ān asks rhetorically, “Is there any doubt regarding God?” [Q. 14:10].<sup>4</sup> And there is no doubt that a created being could, if need be, prove the existence of a Creator from the fact of his own createdness, yet even before such a need arises, the existence of a perfect Creator is known from the *fitra*, and this knowledge is ingrained, necessary, and obvious (*maghrūra fi-l-fitra, ḏarūriyya badīhīyya awwaliyya*).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, pp. 15-16.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 129.

<sup>5</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 324. Also see *DT*, vol. 7, p. 300, where he says that affirming God's existence is ‘...*fitrī ḏarūrī*’.

It is crucial to note that Ibn Taymiyya emphasizes this *fitra*-knowledge as being inherent and ingrained – it is not deduced, or inferred, or acquired through introspection, but rather it simply exists, placed there by God Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Responding to the complicated premises upon which the Proof of God from the Createdness of Accidents is built, he writes that the *fitra* informs every created, sentient being that it is created, and hence there is a Creator, without the need of discussing cosmological concepts such as ‘accidents’ and ‘possibilities’.<sup>2</sup> Just as every person, when he sees some writing or a building, knows that there must have been a writer or a builder, similarly, the *fitra* inherently informs man of the existence of the Creator simply from the observation of creation. And this is why even a young child is aware of this fact, before studying any of the *kalām* proofs for God’s Existence.<sup>3</sup>

The *fitra* in itself informs one that a created object must have a Creator – there is no need for the convoluted premises and conclusions entailed in the *kalām* proofs.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Ibn Taymiyya states, the very theologians who derived such proofs already believed in God because of the *fitra*, even before they brought forth such proofs, and this is a matter that they themselves must acknowledge to be true. This pre-cognition

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<sup>1</sup> W. Hallaq, “Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,” p. 56. The question arises whether this knowledge is *a priori* or not. Hallaq seems to think so (*ibid.*, p. 54). However, Griffel feels that this *fitra*-based knowledge only comes after inspection of and exposure to one’s surrounds; see: F. Griffel, “The Harmony of Natural Law and Shari‘a in Islamist Theology” p. 46. I believe that a case can be made for either interpretation. In some of the quotes that I have compiled, Ibn Taymiyya clearly suggests that the *fitra* analyzes one’s surroundings and concludes there is a God, which would make knowledge of God *a posteriori*. Yet, in others, he seems to suggest that the *fitra* inherently and innately supplies this knowledge without any need for introspection.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 119. Also see: *DT*, vol. 3, p. 124, where he mentions that it is known by the *fitra* every change (*ḥādith*) in nature must have a Being that caused it (*muḥdith*).

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 212.

proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that certainty in God's Existence is not dependant on these proofs, regardless of whether one claims them to be valid or not.<sup>1</sup>

So strong is this *fitra*-belief in God, writes Ibn Taymiyya, that even those who outwardly denied God's existence – such as Pharaoh – knew from their *fitra* that He existed.<sup>2</sup>

But this does not imply that belief in God stems solely from the *fitra*: belief is both *fitra*-based and faith-based. And the *fitra*-based belief, which in essence is recognizing His Existence, is ingrained in a person, and not in need of external evidence. It is the deepest-rooted of all knowledge, and the most solid of all facts, and the foundation of all other foundations.<sup>3</sup>

Crucially, for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fitra* does not only affirm a generic belief in a God, but also informs one of some of the main Attributes of God. It informs him of monotheism: the fact that the Creator must be One – not two, nor a plurality. Ibn Taymiyya claims that a belief in a plurality of creators is something that the *fitra* knows to be illogical and nonsensical.<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, the *fitra* affirms each and every perfection for God. For Ibn Taymiyya, "...all that the heart intrinsically admires and finds to be perfect, the *fitra*

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, pp. 461-2.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 9, p. 375. In *DT*, vol. 9, pp. 362-365 he gives a more detailed argument for the fact that God must be One, and then claims that this argument is ingrained within the *fitra*. He states that all changes that occur indicate that there must be One Being who is capable of bringing about that change. If there were two, then both of them could not bring about the exact same change, else one of them would not be effective.

informs one that to God belongs this perfection in the most ideal manner.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, the *fīṭra* informs man that God knows, sees and hears all things, open and secret,<sup>2</sup> and that the One who is all-powerful is more perfect than the one who is not.<sup>3</sup> The pure *fīṭra* informs man that because of God’s perfect nature, He is worthy of being loved, obeyed and worshipped.<sup>4</sup> It also informs one of the Perfection of God’s Attributes,<sup>5</sup> that He must have Divine Attributes worthy of Him,<sup>6</sup> and that He is Generous and Munificent, and responds to the prayer of the one in distress, and helps and aids him.<sup>7</sup> It is for this reason that Abraham was able to challenge his father’s idolatry by asking him, “O father! Why do you worship that which cannot hear, see or benefit you in the least?” [Q. 18:42]<sup>8</sup>

Of particular importance for Ibn Taymiyya was God’s Transcendence (‘ulūww), for he viewed this as a matter that has clearly been affirmed by the *fīṭra*, without the need for Scriptural proofs. In the famous ḥadīth of the slave-girl, who was illiterate and could not speak, Ibn Taymiyya says that when she was quizzed by the Prophet ‘Where is God?’ she immediately pointed upwards, guided by her pure *fīṭra*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 10, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 10, p. 76.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 10, p. 153.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, 73.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 10, p. 154.

<sup>7</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> *DT*, vol. 10, p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* vol. 4, p. 62. Ibn Taymiyya appears to link God’s phsyical transcedency with the *fīṭra* in multiple places, such as in vol. 3, p. 221, vol. 5, p. 260, p. 286, and p. 320; and in *DT*, vol. 5, p. 56, p. 312, vol. 6, p. 12, vol. 7, p. 5.

In another passage, Ibn Taymiyya writes that the *fitra* bestows on man three matters: knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*), the feeling of loving Him (*maḥabba*), and realizing that He alone is the most beloved of all beings, which is the essence of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). And all of this is embodied in the testimony of faith: *la ilāha illa Allāh*.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the *fitra* incorporates both belief in God's existence and turning to Him in submission.<sup>2</sup>

The *fitra* also causes one to venerate God and imbibes a desire to worship Him. He writes, "...and the *fitra* of His servants are ingrained (*majbūla*) to love Him, but there are those whose *fitra* has been corrupted."<sup>3</sup> The *fitra* causes the heart to turn to God alone, and worship and love Him.<sup>4</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya, the Qur'ān shows that all peoples, from all societies, turn to God at times of need. The *fitra* forces one to seek help from his Creator, and call out to Him at times of distress.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya believes that the heart is intrinsically conditioned (*maftūra*) to always be in need of its Lord and Creator,<sup>6</sup> and this knowledge always leads a pure *fitra* toward action that will permit him to connect it to his Lord, such as worship, submission, and prayer.<sup>7</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya writes, "...and we have explained on many occasions that the acknowledgment of God's existence, and a knowledge of Him, and loving Him, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 344-5; also see *ibid.*, vol. 16, pp. 350-1, and *DT*, vol. 7, p. 427, and *DT*, vol. 8, p. 449.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 67. On the next page, he writes that this love of God increases with the purity of the *fitra*, and decreases the more corrupted it is. See: *DT*, vol. 6, p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 10, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> He quotes a number of verses from the Qur'ān that mentions this phenomenon. See: *DT*, vol. 3, p. 129, vol. 6, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 1, p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 14, pp. 31-2.

unifying Him, are from the *fitra*, and firm in the heart, even though he himself might presume that [such a knowledge] is not in his heart!”<sup>1</sup> It is this non-existent doubt, claims Ibn Taymiyya, that causes some of these scholars of *kalām* to attempt to prove God’s existence via convoluted methods, even though these methods raise more doubts, and the *fitra* would have sufficed them the trouble of deriving and believing in these proofs!<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, for Ibn Taymiyya, the best and most thorough proof for the existence of God is the knowledge of Him that each and every soul has, even before it comes into this world. This knowledge is neither derived nor inferred; rather, it is implanted, inborn, necessary and immediate. So powerful and efficacious is this knowledge that many who verbally deny God internally know of His existence, and only those who have corrupted their *fitras* need waste time with speculative proofs and syllogisms that attempt to prove God’s existence.<sup>3</sup>

#### 2.2.5 The *fitra* and Human Emotion & Morality

In light of the previous section, it is clear that Ibn Taymiyya views the *fitra* as being more than just knowledge – not only does it bestow on man necessary knowledge, it also bestows emotions and desires as well.<sup>4</sup> Ibn Taymiyya claims that the *fitra* comprises both the internal knowledge and the capacity of action (*al-quwwa al-*

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 461.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 462. Also see: N. Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> See as well: W. Hallaq, “Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,” pp. 55-7.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 425.

*'ilmīyya al-'amaliyya*) needed to submit to God, as long as no external factor prevents it from doing so.<sup>1</sup> So the very desire and motivation to love God and worship Him stems from the *fīṭra*, just as the desire to eat, drink and procreate stems from the body.<sup>2</sup>

Also, for Ibn Taymiyya, it is the *fīṭra* that causes man to want to attain the truth. Uncorrupted intellects (*al-'uqūl al-salīma*) are innately created (*maftūra*) to acknowledge the truth as long as there are no impeding factors.<sup>3</sup> The *fīṭra* intrinsically loves the truth and rejects falsehood:<sup>4</sup> a pure *fīṭra* will, in fact, be repulsed by blatant falsehoods,<sup>5</sup> and no one with a pure *fīṭra* will be convinced by the specious arguments of any who oppose the truth.<sup>6</sup> In another place, Ibn Taymiyya writes that a person with a pure *fīṭra* will necessarily follow the truth and love it once it is presented to him; however, if it has been corrupted, then it will not accept the truth.<sup>7</sup>

Crucially for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fīṭra* entails not only an absence of false beliefs, but also a willingness to accept correct beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya also believes that the *fīṭra* informs man of the basis of morality – such as being truthful, and honest, and loving one's relatives.<sup>9</sup> The *fīṭra* has within it the

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 449-450. See: N. Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 377.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 383, *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, vol. 7, p. 528, vol. 10, p. 474. Also see: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 4, p. 207.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 234 – here he is approvingly quoting from Ibn Rushd.

<sup>7</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 15, p. 240.

<sup>8</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 245; also *ibid.* vol. 14, p. 296; N. Madjid, *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, p. 134.

<sup>9</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 20, p. 121.

capability to deter one from telling lies, and the desire to preach the truth to others.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that certain practices that dictate personal hygiene are mentioned in ḥadīth texts as being part and parcel of the *fitra*.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya writes, “Souls are naturally disposed (*majbūla*) to love justice and its supporters, and to hate injustice and its supporters; this love, which is in the *fitra*, is what is meant for [justice] to be good.”<sup>3</sup>

Such *fitra*-induced morality even appears to have, interestingly enough, legal ramifications as well. In one *fatwa* dealing with a complex inheritance question, Ibn Taymiyya invokes the notion of the *fitra* to solve it, claiming that a sound *fitra* necessitates this particular response.<sup>4</sup>

#### 2.2.6 The *fitra* vis-à-vis the ‘*aql*’

A key issue regarding Ibn Taymiyya’s theory of the *fitra* is its relationship to and interaction with the human intellect (‘*aql*’). Did Ibn Taymiyya view the *fitra* as being a part of the intellect, or as another type of rationality that works in tandem with the

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 21, p. 306. The ten matters mentioned in Prophetic traditions as being part of the *fitra* are: trimming the mustache, allowing the beard to grow, brushing the teeth, washing the mouth, blowing the nose with water, trimming the nails, washing in between the finger joints, plucking the underarm hair, shaving the pubic hair, and circumcision.

<sup>3</sup> *Al-Radd ‘alā al-manṭiqiyīn*, p. 423; taken from Ovamir, *Politics, Law and Community in Islamic Thought*, p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 31, pp. 106–7. The question is about a person who writes in his will that he bequeaths his gardens as a trust (*waqf*) to his children and their children after them, such that it shall continue to be inherited generation after generation; and if one of these individuals dies without leaving any descendants, then his or her share will be given to the siblings or other individuals of his or her generation. The actual question is: ‘So if someone dies with a child, should his share be given to his brothers and sisters, or to his children, since the structure of the will does not explicitly state what is to be done?’ Ibn Taymiyya replies that the wording, the implied derivation from the explicit condition, and the *fitra* all inform us that the author of the will intended that the share of any person go to his or her offspring in case such offspring exist. For the entire question and response, see *ibid.*, vol. 31, pp. 100–113.

intellect, or as a supra-rational human faculty independent of the ‘*aql*? The answer to this question is not a simple one, for quotations can be found that support all three of these scenarios.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious, from what has preceded that Ibn Taymiyya views the *fitra* as a primary source of knowledge regarding the Existence of God, and of morality.<sup>2</sup> Hence, clearly, the *fitra* has a key epistemological role. But, in contrast to the human mind, which does not provide any necessary knowledge, the *fitra* bestows necessary knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. Hallaq posits some of these same scenarios, and is himself somewhat ambivalent with regards to this issue. He claims (p. 54) that Ibn Taymiyya’s “...position may even be construed as contradictory”, and then later (p. 66), “But [Ibn Taymiyya’s] concept of *fitra* is highly problematic, lending itself to two possible interpretations. On the one hand, *fitra* represents a knowledge of God inborn in men upon birth, and on the other, it represents a medium for knowing the existence of God through the *necessary* sense perception of the Signs [of God].” He then claims that the first response would be circular, whereas the second would make the *fitra* an empirical source of reasoning. See: W. Hallaq, “Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,” pp. 66-7.

Nurcholish Madjid, in his *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa*, (pp. 85-7), argues that the two terms (i.e., *fitra* and ‘*aql*) operate in a synonymous meaning for Ibn Taymiyya; however, he does not cite any quotations that demonstrate this.

Jon Hoover, in his *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (pp. 39-44), realizes that these two terms are ‘closely linked’ but claims that ‘...it is difficult to pinpoint the exact relationship.’ He states that at times Ibn Taymiyya uses the *fitra* as synonymous with ‘*aql*, but also uses either to be the origin of the other. He surmises that both of these two terms are functionally equivalent sources for attaining true knowledge of God’s existence. While my own conclusions are somewhat similar to those of Hoover, I do believe that certain important nuances have not been fully flushed out in Hoover’s brief look at the *fitra*. Most significantly, he does not comment on the important notion of the ‘*aql* sometimes correcting, and sometimes being corrected by the *fitra*, and vice-versa. This clearly shows that the two entities are separate, albeit related.

Ovamir Anjum also has a brief discussion on the role of *fitra* and its relationship to ‘*aql*, in his *Political Law and Community in Islamic Thought*, pp. 220-7. I believe his views mirror much of what I have written, although of course the context of his dicussion is more relevant to political theory and ethical truths.

I hope that in this section, it is demonstrated that Ibn Taymiyya’s arguments, while potentially problematic, can actually be reconciled if it is understood that the *fitra* is a human faculty that is both an intuitive source of knowledge and a rational faculty.

<sup>2</sup> Also see: B. Abrahamov, “Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20:1 (1993), p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> He writes that the Qur’ān (Q. 16:78), does indicate that a child is born without having any knowledge. See: *DT*, vol. 8, p. 460.

Ibn Taymiyya writes that the claim some people make that that a child is born without any knowledge, like a *tabula rasa*, is a manifestly false claim.<sup>1</sup> The knowledge supplied by the *fitra* is firmly ingrained in the character and imbedded in the soul (*thubūt fi al-jibilla, maghrūra fi-l-nufūs*); whoever attempts to rid himself of that knowledge will not be able to completely eliminate it from himself.<sup>2</sup> This knowledge cannot help but be known to all people, for in fact “...they are compelled towards it, and they cannot possibly repel it from themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

God has implanted knowledge in the heart of every person, knowledge that co-exists with a pure, uncorrupted *fitra*.<sup>4</sup> The knowledge that is ingrained in the *fitra* is so self-evident, Ibn Taymiyya writes, that sometimes when one attempts to prove or define it, this further complicates or obfuscates the matter.<sup>5</sup> However, not all knowledge derived from the *fitra* possesses the same level of certainty, for certain facts are more apparent than others.<sup>6</sup>

The knowledge of the *fitra* is an affirmed and necessary knowledge, whereas the knowledge of the mind is negated (in a newborn at least), and is an acquired knowledge. Therefore, it appears that for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fitra* itself cannot acquire more knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, 4, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 276. Hallaq writes, “The knowledge embodied in the *fitra* simple exists there, and its ultimate source is no other than God.” See: W. Hallaq, “Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,” p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 5, p. 312.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 319.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 18.

It is not just factual knowledge that the *fitra* endows on humans. At times, Ibn Taymiyya appears to use the term to be synonymous with what may be termed ‘common-sense’<sup>1</sup> for example, that ‘one is half of two’.<sup>2</sup> He states that many facts that are supported by correct rational analogies are already known from the pure, uncorrupted *fitra*.<sup>3</sup> In fact, correct analogies are a part of the *fitra* itself.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, many of the premises of logic (*mantiq*) are known from the *fitra* without the need of understanding complex syllogisms or sophisticated terminologies.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya writes the *fitra* is only one of two ways that God has blessed mankind, for by the *fitra* alone mankind would worship and love God, as long as the *fitra* is not corrupted. The second source of God’s blessings on mankind includes the external sources of guidance, such as the intellect, and the prophets, and the Books that God revealed.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly interesting in that Ibn Taymiyya seems to place the *fitra* in a category of its own, and then equates the intellect, and the Prophets, and Divine Books, as being in the same category of supra-*fitra* knowledge. He also explicitly describes the *fitra* as being ‘the Divine Law’, the ‘*salafi* way’ and ‘rational, indubitable

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<sup>1</sup> As in *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 571 and vol. 9, pp. 143-4,

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 221.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 29, 124.

<sup>5</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 8, p. 205.

proofs.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, he describes it with adjectives such as ‘rationally sound’, and ‘readily available’ (*al-fitriyya al-‘aqliyya al-shari‘iya al-qarība al-ṣahīha*).<sup>2</sup>

On another occasion, he seems to suggest that man’s intellect is itself a part of the *fitra*.<sup>3</sup> This clearly indicates a partial or even complete overlap between ‘*aql*’ and *fitra*.

True intellect, Ibn Taymiyya writes, is supported by the *fitra*, and the *fitra* bestows knowledge that the intellect knows to be sound.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the best proofs are proofs that are both *fitra* and ‘*aql*’ based. That is why God sends Prophets with rational proofs; in order to guide the *fitra* back to its pure state.<sup>5</sup> Valid evidences need to be both rational and *fitra*-based (“*aqliyya fitriyya*”).<sup>6</sup>

Yet, there can at times be a conflict between the *fitra* and the ‘*aql*’, and when this is the case, it is the *fitra* that acts as an internal mechanism to check the validity of the intellect. He writes: “So correct rational thought is that which can be understood by pure and proper *fitras* – those that have not had their capacity to understand corrupted.”<sup>7</sup> The rationalists themselves always use premises that other rationalists

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 4, p. 163. See also *DT*, vol. 5, p. 61, where he equates the *fitra* with ‘rationality’, ‘the Texts’ and ‘what has been narrated (i.e., from the *salaf*)’.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 314.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 38 – the phrase is ‘*uqūl banī Adam allatī fatarahum Allahu ‘alayhā*.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 242.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 4, p. 279. He also uses a similar phrase in *DT*, vol. 6, p. 14 (see footnote).

<sup>7</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 43.

contradict, yet the followers of the truth rely on rational premises that people of sound *fitra* know to be true ('*fitar al-‘uqalā’ al-salīmī-l-fitra*').<sup>1</sup>

Thus, for Ibn Taymiyya, there is an inherent relationship between the intellect and the *fitra*, for a corruption of one necessitates a corruption of the other, and the purity of one implies the purity of the other. However, the corruption of the *fitra* is more difficult and occurs after passing through greater impediments; it is for this reason that many people of intellect will discover, through their *fitra*, that their rational positions were invalid.<sup>2</sup>

The locus of the *fitra* appears to be the heart, not intellect, for Ibn Taymiyya seems to ascribe it to the heart when he writes, "And the heart, by its very *fitra*, is aware of that."<sup>3</sup>

After all of the above-mentioned references, the question still remains: what is one to make of the relationship between the '*aql*' and the *fitra*? It appears that there is some ambiguity in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, but, when one examines these collectively, we can extrapolate a salvageable working relationship.

Perhaps the greatest source of confusion seems to be the desire to classify Ibn Taymiyya's notion of the *fitra* as either being a receptacle for knowledge or for rational thought.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly problematic as Ibn Taymiyya, quite clearly, views it as

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 4, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 281. Hallaq seems to miss this point entirely. He claims that, for Ibn Taymiyya, a rational proof is not as certain as *fitra* proofs, but Ibn Taymiyya only allows it since "...any attempt at reaching knowledge about God's existence is certainly better than none." See: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> This is what Hallaq posits: an *either-or* scenario, and hence he finds difficulty internally reconciling Ibn Taymiyya's thoughts on the *fitra*, accusing them of being contradictory. See: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God,"

incorporating both of these elements, and even more. Just as man's faculties operate in tandem with one another (for example, the eyes and ears co-operate together with the intellect to assess, analyze and digest information) so too, the *fitra* and the '*aql*' work together, sometimes analyzing or supplying the same information, and sometimes analyzing or supplying different facts.

Ibn Taymiyya views the *fitra* as being an extra-rational source of both knowledge and reflection. In other words, not only does the *fitra* provide immediate, necessary, and efficacious knowledge (for example, knowledge of the existence of God), it may also be used as a *means of reflection* that is at a higher order of empirical value than that of the human intellect. The *fitra* also depends on and feeds off the intellect, for the presence of a sound intellect is necessary in order for the *fitra* to digest information. However, when one's logical reasoning and intellectual conclusions appear to be shaky, it is the *fitra* that can be resorted to to corroborate and validate the human '*aql*'.

Interestingly, from Ibn Taymiyya's writings we can also extrapolate a spiritual connection between the *fitra* and the '*aql*', for a corruption of one will necessarily result in a corruption of the other, and the rectification of one will result in the rectification of the other.

Anjum writes that, for Ibn Taymiyya,<sup>1</sup>

*Fitra* is neither equivalent to intellect, nor primordial propositional knowledge, nor a rational premise or argument. Rather, *fitra* is a divinely placed inclination in the human psyche toward all that is good, which provides guidance to intellect, which is a tool and thus can be used for good or evil. *Fitra* separates

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p. 66. My position, I believe, takes all of Ibn Taymiyya's statements into account, and salvages the integrity of Ibn Taymiyya's position while positing a fully-formed and consistent theory of human knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Anjum, *Politics, Law and Community in Islamic Thought*, p. 223.

‘right reason’ from reason’s misguided uses. In reaching the ultimate truths, *fitra* and intellect are complimentary and interdependent, and, therefore, insufficient without each other.

To summarize, it appears that Ibn Taymiyya views the *fitra* as an independent faculty that God has blessed man with – one that works in tandem with the ‘*aql* and yet is more deeply embedded in man’s psyche, and consequently more difficult to corrupt. The knowledge of the *fitra* is necessary (*darūrī*), whereas the knowledge of the ‘*aql* is acquired (*muktasab*). Additionally, the knowledge embedded in the *fitra*, while not as detailed as the ‘*aql*, is more immediate than any knowledge the intellect can derive, yet the ‘*aql*’s power of reasoning is superior to that of the *fitra*, for the *fitra* can only analyze the most immediate and basic facts – those related to God, His Divine Attributes, and the broad bases of morality. True *fitra* supports correct ‘*aql*, and correct ‘*aql* likewise is affirmed via the *fitra*.

#### 2.2.7 The Nourishing and Corruption of the *fitra*

An extremely fascinating component of the *fitra* that Ibn Taymiyya mentions time and again is that of the nourishment and corruption of the *fitra*. Once again, this notion reconciles perfectly with Ibn Taymiyya’s overall theory of the *fitra*. For Ibn Taymiyya, the nourishment of the *fitra* is achieved by believing in, submitting to, and obeying the prophetic message, and its corruption occurs by rejecting, disobeying, or not acting upon the prophetic message.

In one passage, Ibn Taymiyya writes that the *fitra* is in need of sustenance in order to flourish, and its sustenance must be from the same genus as its own

composition. Hence, the *fitra* needs to know and act upon the *Shari'a* in order to become perfect.<sup>1</sup> In another place, Ibn Taymiyya mentions that the *fitra* is "...strengthened by the reality of faith and the light of the Qur'ān".<sup>2</sup> Consciousness of God (*taqwā*) also protects the *fitra*.<sup>3</sup> And the more the *fitra* grows and flourishes, the more it will benefit in terms of what it can bestow upon its owner.<sup>4</sup>

Just as it can grow, the *fitra* can also be overridden and silenced via false arguments, or following one's customs, or blindly following those in authority – as an example, Ibn Taymiyya writes, a Christian will subdue (*yaqhur*) his own *fitra* when he believes that Jesus the son of Mary is divine.<sup>5</sup>

The *fitra* may also be corrupted by a lack of knowledge and implementation of the sayings of the Prophet, and by deceitful speech.<sup>6</sup> Ibn Taymiyya claims that when an innocent neophyte begins to question the scholars of *kalām* regarding something that his *fitra* does not correspond with, he will be mocked and told that his intelligence is not up to par for such matters. Feeling intimidated, such a student will force himself to accept a position that his own *fitra* is uncomfortable with, until his religion, intelligence and *fitra* are all corrupted.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* vol. 10, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 10, p. 474.

<sup>3</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 15, p. 438.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p.383.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 272.

<sup>6</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 141.

<sup>7</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 295-6.

The *fīṭra* can be corrupted, or eliminated in totality, or be present in some limited form and yet not benefit from evidences shown to it, just as a blind man may have eyes which do not see,<sup>1</sup> or a person with weak eyes cannot see properly.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Ibn Taymiyya writes, "...a corrupted *fīṭra* might not be able to recognize the truth, or presume falsehood to be the truth."<sup>3</sup> Worse, claims Ibn Taymiyya: a complete corruption of the *fīṭra* leads one to be Satanic in nature.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, even if the *fīṭra* of some segments of mankind can be corrupted, the *fīṭra* of the masses cannot all unite in denying anything that is known by necessity. It is true, concedes Ibn Taymiyya, that it is possible for large groups to consider falsehood to be valid if they all agree or are taught to agree with something that is contrary to the truth.<sup>5</sup> But even if one group of mankind has had their *fīṭra* corrupted, another group will be found whose *fīṭra* is pure – all of mankind, Ibn Taymiyya assures us, cannot corrupt the *fīṭra* simultaneously.<sup>6</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya informs us that even a corrupt *fīṭra* can still be of benefit. The *fīṭra* is so powerful that many leaders of false beliefs realize that their beliefs are incorrect because of the overriding nature of the *fīṭra* to correct such beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Ibn Taymiyya

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 16, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 306.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 271.

<sup>6</sup> *DT*, vol. 7, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 376-7.

claims that even those who outwardly denied God's existence – such as Pharaoh – knew from their *fitra* that God existed.<sup>1</sup>

If the *fitra* of an individual has been corrupted, not all hope is lost. For Ibn Taymiyya, a corrupted *fitra* can be rectified and brought back to its pure state if the heart is cleansed of those factors that corrupted it.<sup>2</sup> The primary method of purifying the *fitra*, Ibn Taymiyya says, is to expose it to the Qur'an, for the Qur'an has in it the cure for all diseases of the heart and soul.<sup>3</sup> When the *fitra* is corrupted, it is in need of correct evidences.<sup>4</sup>

Another way to remedy a corrupted *fitra* is through examining rational proofs and using sound reason. The uncorrupted mind can be used to correct a corrupted *fitra*. It is for this reason that the evidences that God uses are not just faith-based, they are also rational, for such evidences can guide the *fitra* back to its original disposition.<sup>5</sup>

To summarize then, Ibn Taymiyya views the *fitra* as being perfected and nourished via belief in the message of the prophets and acceptance of Divine Revelation; by piety and God-consciousness; and by correct rational thought. And it is corrupted by doubts; the following of one's desires; and by the evil influences of a corrupt society or upbringing.

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> Majmū' al-Fatāwā vol. 10, p. 135. Note that W. Hallaq appears to have overlooked Ibn Taymiyya's quotes where he explicitly says that a corrupted *fitra* can be nourished back to the truth; Hallaq writes, incorrectly, that Ibn Taymiyya claims, "...once a *fitra* becomes corrupt it has no way of regaining its original, sound condition." See: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya on the Existence of God," p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 3, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> Majmū' al-Fatāwā, vol 6, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> See: DT, vol. 4, p. 279, vol. 7, p. 38, vol. 8, p. 103, and Majmū' al-Fatāwā, vol. 9, p. 242.

It is pertinent to note that, for Ibn Taymiyya, the *fitra*, the ‘*aql* and the Qur’ān appear to work in tandem, all guiding the person to the truth, and correcting one or both of the others if they are corrupt.<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.2.8 The *fitra* and Pre-destination

The notion of the *fitra* has, for some classical Sunnī authorities (and the Ash‘arī theologian al-Bayhaqī), been interpreted to signify God’s predestination.<sup>2</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya appears to have been ambivalent regarding the interpretation of the *fitra* as implying God’s pre-destination. While acknowledging that this interpretation was found in classical sources,<sup>3</sup> he states that understanding the traditions of the *fitra* as dealing with pre-destination “...does not contradict” understanding them in light of its other meaning, namely a general submission to God.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is clear, especially in light of the numerous quotes in earlier sections, that for Ibn Taymiyya the primary role of the *fitra* is its epistemological nature. In fact,

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<sup>1</sup> This triad will be elaborated upon in the Conclusion of this dissertation.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship of the *fitra* with the topic of *qadr* will not be elaborated here, as it is not directly relevant to this chapter’s emphasis on the epistemological role of the *fitra*. For details, see: Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd li-mā fī Muwaṭṭa min al-Ma‘āni wa-l-asānīd*, vol. 6, pp. 359–367; Livnat, Holtzman, “Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fitra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya,” in *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*, ed. Y. Rappaport and S. Ahmed, pp. 163–88.

I must point out that I feel Livnat’s article misrepresents Ibn Taymiyya’s position on pre-destination, based on the author’s understanding of select passages from the *Dar’*. Had she examined Ibn Taymiyya’s other writings (and in particular those collected in volume 8 of *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*) she could not have reached such conclusions. The author argues that Ibn Taymiyya “...almost embraces the Mu’tazilī position” regarding pre-destination (p. 182); this is, frankly, a grossly inaccurate statement that does not stand up to Ibn Taymiyya’s own writings. No doubt, his views are extremely different from those of the deterministic Ash‘arīs, but he fully affirms not only God’s foreknowledge, but also God’s control over all future events, in contrast to the Mu’tazilī view.

<sup>3</sup> See: *DT*, vol. 8, p. 360 and vol. 8, pp. 386–7. Also see *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 8, pp. 45–6, p. 222, and p. 395 where he discusses two types of *fitra* related to pre-destination.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 361.

on one occasion he explicitly refutes the interpretation that *fitra* exclusively means God's pre-destination. He does this based on four points. Firstly, he says that this would imply a child is born upon God's foreknowledge of what he or she will do – yet this knowledge of God is not unique for children, but rather for all creatures. So what is the point of specifying that every *child* shall be born on the *fitra*, when in fact each object of creation has its pre-destiny already recorded? Secondly, had this been the case, there is no sense in claiming that "...*his parents will turn him into a Christian, Jew or Zoroastrian*", for there would be no point specifying these faiths and leaving Islam out.<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, if the reference of the *fitra* was to pre-destination, the analogy of a newborn being like an unbranded animal, and a non-Muslim adult being like a branded animal, would make no sense. And lastly, had the meaning of *fitra* been God's pre-destination, of what use would it be to specify this at the birth of a child, for God's pre-destination is operative at every instance.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, we can conclude that while Ibn Taymiyya affirmed the Sunnī doctrine of God's pre-destination, he did not understand the *fitra* traditions as being directly related to this doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning: if the *fitra* were God's pre-destination, then even the Islam of a Muslim child would occur as a result of it, hence it should have been mentioned. Its absence indicates that the *fitra* is something other than God's decree.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 8, pp. 387-8. He does go on to state that *qadr* is an agreed upon fact, and that God does decree the life of a child, but that this is not the primary meaning of the *fitra*.

### 2.2.9 The Overall Role of the *fitra*

Now that various facets related to the *fitra* have been discussed, we can cautiously attempt to extrapolate Ibn Taymiyya's overall view of the epistemological framework of the *fitra*.

Ibn Taymiyya makes the case for the *fitra* being a faculty that validates external truths, including *rational* truths and *textual* truths. He gives the paradigm of the *fitra* in its acknowledgment of the truth as that of eyesight and the Sun: every healthy eye would be able to see the Sun as long as the eye is not covered up. False beliefs (*viz.*, a corruption of the *fitra*) are like veils that cover one's eyes and block the truth from reaching it.<sup>1</sup> In another analogy, the *fitra* is the eyesight that needs to be aided by the light of the Qur'ān in order to view the truth as it should appear. Ignorance is darkness, hence in a state of ignorance the *fitra* might not be able to see the truth.<sup>2</sup> In a third analogy, a corrupted *fitra* is likened to a sick body that finds something sweet to be bitter, or a weak eye that might see one object as being two.<sup>3</sup> In each of these examples, the role of the *fitra* is to verify what is clearly true – be it the brightness of the Sun or the taste of a delicacy. The *fitra* is compared to the faculty of eyesight or taste – a receptacle for analyzing types of information, processing that information, and then supplying the person with a meaningful and correct assessment regarding this information.

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 20, p. 44. Also see: W. Hallaq, "Ibn Taymiyya On the Existence of God," p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 306.

For Ibn Taymiyya, part of the information that the *fitra* must identify is the truthfulness of a prophet and the validity of a Divine Message: merely by being exposed to either of these matters, a pure *fitra* can assess and recognize this claim to be genuine or false. Additionally, every single rational proof must, eventually, be validated by knowledge residing in the *fitra* – a knowledge that God has intrinsically placed in the hearts of men. In fact, every *derived* (*muktasab*) knowledge must eventually be validated by *inherent* (*darūrī*) knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the *fitra* is essential in deciding which group's position is correct, in light of the fact that each group claims to be using an understanding of a Divine Text, or rational arguments, to derive the truth, and yet each group refutes the other groups positing claims that are contradicted by them. Since no one group can claim authoritative intellectual prowess over the other, there is no alternative but to resort to the pure, undistorted *fitra* – the *fitra* that has not been corrupted by false beliefs or desires.<sup>2</sup> That is because the people of true *fitra* can never say anything that contradicts clear rationality, and therefore they can be used as a criterion to resolve the theological disputes between the groups.<sup>3</sup>

The obvious question that arises here is: who will be the criterion to decide what is the unadulterated *fitra*? For Ibn Taymiyya, true Muslims, meaning the *Ahl al-Sunna*, are the ones who maintain the *fitra* in its purest form.<sup>4</sup> In fact, any correct beliefs found

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 3, p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 6, p. 145, and *DT*, vol. 7, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 12, p. 462.

in those who have turned away from the Qur'ān and ḥadīth is merely due to the fact that they have followed their true *fitra* in those beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

In discussing the relationship between the *fitra*, the intellect, and the Sacred Texts, it is quite clear as we piece together Ibn Taymiyya's thought that the *fitra* is an independent faculty that, epistemologically at least,<sup>2</sup> is a subset of an intersection of both correct *'aql* and the Divine *Shari'a* – meaning, everything in the *fitra* may be derived from correct reasoning, and from the message of the Prophets, and the *fitra* yields nothing more than what a pure intellect and God's Revelation would contain.<sup>3</sup> Yet, most importantly, the reverse relationship is really what is at stake for Ibn Taymiyya: it is the *fitra* that validates the message of a true prophet, and it is the *fitra* that verifies what constitutes correct rational inquiry. And the perfect harmony of the *fitra*, *'aql* and *Shari'a* may only occur, not just within the religion of Islam, but more precisely within the beliefs of true Orthodoxy (i.e., *Ahl al-Sunna*). Any other beliefs, whether they be those of the *mutakallimūn* or *falāsifa*, or theologies of other faiths, would simply not produce a harmonious relationship between these three concepts. Since the *fitra* is divinely and internally ingrained in each individual, ultimately, it is its job to recognize a true prophet from a false one, and to validate true rational thought from irrational thought.

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<sup>1</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 13, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> 'Epistemologically' because the *fitra* also has, for Ibn Taymiyya, psychological and emotive functions as well.

<sup>3</sup> See for example *DT*, vol. 9, p. 15, where he states that a particular matter that the *fitra* informs us may also be known from the message of the prophets, or from correct reasoning and analogy. Also see *DT*, vol. 9, p. 171, where he equates the *fitra* with the intellect, and with the Qur'ān and Sunna.

It is fitting to conclude this section with one of the final quotes in the *Dar'* about the concept of the *fitra*. Ibn Taymiyya writes, criticizing those who deny or misinterpret God's Attributes,<sup>1</sup>

...from the Mu'tazilīs, and those who followed them from the Ash'arīs and others from the four legal schools – these people have turned away from the natural response [viz., of affirming the Attributes], and intended to change the human *fitra*, just as they have changed the Sacred Texts. But perfection is only achieved by perfecting the *fitra*, which itself is perfected by the revealed Texts. For the prophets were all sent to affirm the *fitra* and perfect it, not to change the *fitra* or distort it.

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 10,, p. 277.

### *2.3 Ibn Taymiyya's Kalām-Influenced Interpretation of the Adamic Covenant*

One of the most intriguing aspects of Ibn Taymiyya's conception of the *fitra* is his interpretation of the Adamic Covenant (*mīthāq*) that is referred to in Q. 7:172. As has been mentioned earlier, the standard traditionalist position, based on explicit Prophetic ḥadīth and numerous sayings attributed to early authorities, is that God extracted the souls of all of mankind from Adam's loins, and then asked them the rhetorical question, 'Am I not your Lord?' to which they all responded in the affirmative. In contrast to this, the Mu'tazilī position, also adopted by al-Rāzī, was that there was no actual extraction, nor was a question explicitly verbalized; rather, the Qur'ānic passage is merely utilizing metaphorical language to illustrate man's propensity for rational inquiry that should lead to monotheism and true guidance.

What is truly astonishing is that Ibn Taymiyya seems to have left the orthodox *salaf*-based position and instead embraced the Mu'tazilī opinion<sup>1</sup> on this issue, with one very significant difference. Whereas for the Mu'tazilīs, the *mīthāq* was a symbolic reference to man's intellect ('aql), for Ibn Taymiyya, the *mīthāq* symbolized the human *fitra* instead.

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<sup>1</sup> While it is true that al-Rāzī as well seems to have adopted this position, the majority of the Ash'arī theologians did not seem to have sympathized with it, as has been shown in Section 2.1.2 of this chapter. Hence, to call this interpretation a 'Mu'tazilī' one is, I believe, justified, especially in light of the fact that they were the ones who first proposed it.

Ibn Taymiyya was clearly aware of the position of earlier traditionalists, including Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s extensive commentary.<sup>1</sup> He quotes Muḥammad b. Ka‘b al-Quraṣī (d. 120/738), commenting on the verse of the Covenant, as saying, “So they affirmed for Him their belief and knowledge, [while they] were souls, and before their bodies had been created.”<sup>2</sup> And he quotes the famous traditionalist Ishāq b. Rāḥawayh (d. 238/853) commenting, “There is unanimous consensus (*ijmā’*) of the people of knowledge that this occurred to the souls before [they were] bodies. God caused them to speak, and to testify against themselves.”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps most poignantly, he even quotes Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr as saying that it was the heretical groups (*Ahl al-Bid‘a*) who denied an actual conversation between man and God on the ‘Day of Am-I-Not’, and it was they who claimed that the reference to the ‘Covenant’ is that God created them in this world and provided them with intellect and with the means to know that He exists.<sup>4</sup> Thus, quite a few times in the *Dar’*, he quotes – seemingly approvingly – these opinions. Yet, there is only one occasion where he elaborates on his own views on this Adamic Covenant, and there he presents a very intricate argument *against* this standard traditionalist version of events.

He states, after his most lengthy discussion of the interpretation and role of the *fitra*,<sup>5</sup> that the majority of mankind and *jinn* acknowledge and testify to the existence of

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<sup>1</sup> See *DT*, vol. 8, p. 439. As has been pointed out earlier, when it came to the notion of *fitra*, Ibn Taymiyya was heavily influenced by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr; yet for the *mīthāq*, Ibn Taymiyya went his own way.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 411.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 414.

<sup>4</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 453.

<sup>5</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 358-468. As has been mentioned earlier, I have not found any section in any of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings where the notion of the *fitra* has been elaborated in as much detail.

God. This testimony is mentioned in Q. 7:172, but, he claims, there are two interpretations of this verse.<sup>1</sup>

The first interpretation, he says, is that which has been narrated from a group of the *salaf*, and there are traditions to this effect attributed to the Prophet, in which this testimony took place after God extracted them from Adam.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, he does not mention that there is even unanimous consensus (*ijmā'*) narrated from his own theological school supporting this interpretation. Additionally, by claiming that only a ‘group of the *salaf*’ held this view, the impression is given that another group held a differing view; however, as has been demonstrated earlier, every Sunnī commentator, commencing with al-Ṭabarī onwards, has narrated dozens of interpretations from the previous generations that all affirm this view.

Nonetheless, he says, this interpretation seems to lack solid evidence. A closer examination of these ḥadīths, Ibn Taymiyya warrants, reveals that they are all problematic. He then begins a very detailed ḥadīth discussion, analyzing a number of famous traditions regarding the Adamic Covenant, and eventually concluding that those that are authentic do not explicitly mention the testimony, and those that are explicit in this regard are not authentic.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 482.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 483.

<sup>3</sup> He analyzes three traditions in detail.

The first is the tradition ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās, in which explicit details of this Adamic Covenant are mentioned, including where it occurred (in a valley outside of the ‘Arafat), and when it occurred (on the Day of ‘Arafat, which is the 9<sup>th</sup> of Dhū'l-Ḥijjah). This tradition is reported in the *Mustadrak* of al-Ḥākim (see: *ibid.*, The Book of Creation, vol. 1, p. 7). Ibn Taymiyya claims, based on *isnād* analysis, that the more correct position is that this tradition has been incorrectly narrated as *marfū'* (originating from the Prophet) whereas it should be considered *mawqūf* ('stopping' at Ibn ‘Abbās as a statement from him).

Ibn Taymiyya argues that nowhere in the Qur'ān or authentic ḥadīth is it mentioned that the children of Adam verbally testified.<sup>1</sup> This being the case, Ibn Taymiyya interpreted the Qur'ānic verse as implying that every man "...is capable of testifying, on his own accord, that God is his Lord."<sup>2</sup> And the meaning of "When your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progenies..." [Q. 7: 172], says Ibn Taymiyya, is that He extracted the sperm from every man and placed it in the womb of the woman, and then these parents gave birth to a child, who in turn will do the same, and so forth for every future generation.<sup>3</sup>

This interpretation, Ibn Taymiyya argues, is supported by the fact that this 'extraction' is referenced as taking place from the '...loins of the *children* of Adam' [Q.

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The second tradition is ascribed to 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, and Ibn Taymiyya believes that this tradition is authentically verified and reported in the *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī (see: *ibid.*, The Book of *Tafsīr*, Chapter: *Sūrat al-A'rāf*, vol. 4, p. 107). However, Ibn Taymiyya points out that this tradition only mentions that Adam's progeny has already been divided into the righteous, who are going to Paradise, and the wicked, who are going to Hell (in this version, after God extracts all men, God tells Adam, 'This group shall go to Paradise, and this group to the Fire'). Ibn Taymiyya stresses that, in this tradition, there is no mention of a verbal covenant between man and God.

The third tradition he mentions is that of Abū Hurayra, narrated in the *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhī, which he also views as being authentic (see: al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, The Book of *Tafsīr*, Chapter: *Sūrat al-A'rāf*, vol. 4, p. 222). In this tradition, Adam sees God extract all of his progeny, and then is dazzled by one of them, who appears to have a very bright light emanating from his forehead. When asked who this person is, God tells him it is David, and he shall live for sixty years; Adam then gifts him forty of his own years to make David's life one hundred years. Once again, Ibn Taymiyya points out, there is no mention of any verbal 'covenant'.

Also, Ibn Taymiyya stresses that it is not clear from these traditions whether Adam was shown his actual children, or images of them. For Ibn Taymiyya, the only point that the authentic tradition mentions is to prove predestination and the foreknowledge of God.

It should be noted that while these three traditions are perhaps the most famous of those dealing with the Adamic Covenant, they are by no means the only ones. Additionally, there are many narrations from the earliest generations regarding the interpretation of this verse, and it is pertinent that in this passage, Ibn Taymiyya makes no reference to them whatsoever. And of course, there is no reference to the unanimous consensus that he himself narrated from Ishāq b. Rāḥawayh.

For a more complete reference to such traditions, see: 'Abd al-'Azīz al-'Uthaym, *Akhth al-Mīthāq* (*Riyād: Aḍwā'* al-Salaf, 1999), pp. 7-60.

<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 484.

<sup>2</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 486.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 487.

7:173], and not from Adam. And this plurality signifies that the subject of the verse is plural (*viz.*, the children of Adam), and not single (*viz.*, Adam alone). Furthermore, he argues, the Qur'ānic term for ‘progeny’ (*dhurriyya*) typically signifies adults, as other examples illustrate.<sup>1</sup>

And the reference to the “*...testify against themselves*” [Q. 7:172] signifies for Ibn Taymiyya an acceptance of His existence. This is because the Qur'ānic usage of the term ‘testify against oneself’ (*ashhada 'alā nafsih*) typically means acknowledging guilt against oneself, and not necessarily a verbal testimony. So, for example, God mentions the pagans as “*...testifying against themselves with disbelief*” [Q. 9:17], meaning that they admitted they were not Muslims, not that they verbally ‘testified’ such. There are other examples as well,<sup>2</sup> all of which clearly indicate that God’s intent in this verse by claiming that the Children of Adam testified against themselves is to say that man is capable of admitting this fact, and not that he actually verbalized it.<sup>3</sup> As an example, Ibn Taymiyya says that a master might point to his slave and say ‘This is my slave,’ and the slave, by virtue of his demeanor and mannerisms, will ‘testify’ to the veracity of his master’s claim without actually verbalizing this testimony.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> He references Q. 3:33; Q. 17:3; Q. 6:84 and Q. 6:85, all of which mention the term *dhurriyya* to signify adult progeny.

<sup>2</sup> He mentions Q. 4:135, Q. 5:8, Q. 6:30, Q. 65:2 and a prophet tradition, all of which have this phrase and are typically understood as indicating tacit approval, not explicit testimony.

<sup>3</sup> DT, vol. 8, pp. 485-6.

<sup>4</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 488.

Also, he points out that if a verbal testimony were to have taken place, it would have made more sense for God to choose an *external* witness, to bear witness against man, rather than to cause him to verbally testify against himself.<sup>1</sup>

He states, “Hence the ‘extraction [of God]’ (*al-akhdh*) implies His creation of them, and the ‘testification’ (*al-*ishhād**) implies that He guided them to this [Divine] recognition.”<sup>2</sup>

So, in summary, Ibn Taymiyya dismisses the traditionalist position of the Adamic Covenant based on the following points:

- He finds there to be no authentic ḥadīth that explicitly mentions the Children of Adam verbally testifying in the presence of God.
- The meaning of *akhdh* (‘extract’) in the verse is not that the souls of mankind were extracted from Adam, but rather than the newborn individual is extracted from its parents. This is proven by the fact that the verse itself contains a number of internal references that indicate the ‘extraction’ merely signifies the creation of every human from the fluids of its parents (for example, by referencing this extraction as taking place from ‘the Children of Adam’, and not from Adam directly).
- The meaning of *ishhād* (‘testimony’) could be an internal corroboration, as the Arabic language and evidences from the Qur’ān clearly demonstrate.
- It does not make sense for such a verbal testimony to emanate from the very person against whom it would apply – rather, had God chosen to do so, He

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 487.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 487.

would have caused a third, neutral party to bear witness in such a verbal manner.

It is interesting to point out that rarely does Ibn Taymiyya do such a thorough investigation of the *isnāds* of the traditions that he uses.<sup>1</sup> His linguistic analysis of the term ‘*ishhād*’ strikingly resembles the very method of *ta’wīl* that he finds problematic amongst the *mutakallimūn*. Additionally, he seems to circumvent the issue of a physical extraction and verbal testimony being the standard ‘*salafī*’ position, ignoring the dozens of quotes narrated from early authorities in books that he is clearly aware of and praises, and is unable to find a single narration that he can quote from *any* scholar before him of the Ḥanbalī school that would support such an interpretation. He even appears to contradict the evidence of unanimous consensus (*ijmā’*) that he firmly believes in as a Divine Source of guidance. Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya employs a clearly Mu’tazilī argument,<sup>2</sup> that the verse mentions God extracting mankind ‘*from the loins of the children of Adam*’, and not merely from Adam. This plurality indicates, both for the Mu’tazilīs and Ibn Taymiyya, that what is being referenced is not an actual Covenant, but rather that God extracts each generation from the proceeding one.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, and perhaps most strikingly, he actually uses rational proofs (for example,

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<sup>1</sup> As a side point, later *Salafī* scholars, and in particular the contemporary Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999), frequently point out specific traditions that Ibn Taymiyya uses but do not meet his (viz., al-Albānī’s) rigorous standards for authenticity.

<sup>2</sup> al-Rāzī also mentions this argument, taken from al-Zamakhsharī, in his *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, p. 398

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 402.

the claim that it would have made more sense for God to employ an external witness) to contradict the literal textual sources and re-interpret the ḥadīth texts.<sup>1</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya's stance on the Adamic Covenant is almost identical to the stance of the Mu'tazilīs and later Ash'arīs, in particular al-Rāzī, in that he holds there was no physical, verbal covenant between God and man. For both Ibn Taymiyya and his interlocutors, this *mīthāq* is a metaphor for man's internal capacity to 'witness' (*ishhād*) the existence and unicity of God.

For all practical intents and purposes, Ibn Taymiyya seems to employ the very hermeneutical techniques and rational methods that he is otherwise so opposed to,<sup>2</sup> while abandoning the standard traditionalist position affirmed before him, and therefore arrives at a position strikingly similar to that of his opponents.

But there is a difference between the two positions, and one that is central in understanding what is really at stake between Ibn Taymiyya and his interlocutors. Whereas for the rationalist school, it was man's '*aql*' that was the receptacle of this witnessing mechanism, for Ibn Taymiyya, it was man's inherent and innate *fīṭra*. For the former school, rationality is what bears witness and testifies to the existence of God, whereas for Ibn Taymiyya, it is the human psyche itself, embodied in the *fīṭra*.

What is to be made of this rather glaring example of an apparently un-Taymiyyan moment? How is it possible that Ibn Taymiyya, in this case, appears to discard the

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya's primary student, Ibn al-Qayyim, also championed this position, summarizing these points of Ibn Taymiyya and adding a few of his own (for example, the fact that no human actually remembers this testimony or conversation, so of what value is it in preventing idolatry?) See his *Kitāb al-Rūh*, pp. 394-404. This position was also championed by Ibn Kathīr and, later, by Rashid Rida (d. 1935).

<sup>2</sup> There is, however, one crucial difference. Whereas both al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya quote evidences to show that the phrase '...testify against oneself' does not need to be understood as a literal testimony, al-Rāzī (and before him al-Zamakhsharī) employs lines of poetry to demonstrate this, whereas Ibn Taymiyya, perhaps not willing to concede such a clearly *ta'wīl*-based tactic, proves this interpretation through other verses of the Qur'ān.

standard *salafī* position and literalist understanding, and adopt the position of the Mu'tazilīs, and one that even al-Rāzī happens to agree with, so much so that he even uses some of the hermeneutical practices of the Mu'tazilīs against the interpretations and narrations of his fellow Ḥanbalīs?

There is only one way to make sense of this. The role that the Mu'tazilīs gave to the human intellect was a role that Ibn Taymiyya wished to confer on the *fitra*, and as a result he had no choice but to use their arguments and employ their evidences regarding the interpretation of the *mīthāq*, but to arrive at a very different conclusion: that their rationalist tendencies and Hellenistic *dalīl* was not needed in light of man's inherent and natural knowledge, ingrained in the *fitra*, that God existed and was worthy of worship. By employing the very same mechanisms as the rationalist *mutakallimūn*, yet arriving at a very different conclusion, he wished to fortify his own preference of the *fitra* over that of the *'aql*.

### *3. Abraham's Search for God Between al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya*

The Qur'ānic account of Abraham, in Q. 6:74-83,<sup>1</sup> relates how he argued with his people regarding God and His existence by successively rejecting the stars, the moon and the Sun as possible lords, and finally turning his face to the One who created them.<sup>2</sup> This story serves as a perfect example to illustrate the theological differences between

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<sup>1</sup> The verses read as follows:

*And [mention, O Muhammad], when Abraham said to his father Azar, "Do you take idols as deities? Indeed, I see you and your people to be in manifest error." And thus did We show Abraham the realms of the heavens and the earth that he would be amongst the certain [in faith]. So when the night covered him [with darkness], he saw a star. He said, "This is my Lord." But when it set, he said, "I like not those that disappear." And when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my lord." But when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray." And when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my lord; this is greater [than the other two]." But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I am free from what you associate [with God]. Indeed, I have turned my face toward He who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward truth, and I am not of those who associate others [with God]." And his people argued with him. He said, "Do you argue with me concerning God while He has guided me? And I fear not what you associate with Him [and will not be harmed] unless my Lord should will something. Verily, my Lord encompasses all things in knowledge; then will you not remember?" [Sūra al-An'ām, 6:74-80]*

Although the Old Testament has no equivalent, there is a similar story in the pseudopigrapha of the *Book of Jubilees*, which was discovered amongst the Qumran manuscripts (although it was previously known from an Ethiopic translation), and is alleged to have been written *circa* 200 B.C. This version goes as follows:

And in the sixth week, in the fifth year thereof, Abram sat up throughout the night on the new moon of the seventh month to observe the stars from the evening to the morning, in order to see what would be the character of the year with regard to the rains, and he was alone as he sat and observed. And a word came into his heart and he said: 'All the signs of the stars, and the signs of the moon and of the sun are all in the hand of the Lord. Why do I search (them) out? If He desireth, He causeth it to rain, morning and evening; And if He desireth, He withholdeth it, And all things are in His hand.' And he prayed that night and said 'My God, God Most High, Thou alone art my God, And Thee and Thy dominion have I chosen. And Thou hast created all things, And all things that are are the work of Thy hands.'

See: *The Book of Jubilees*, tr. R. H. Chase (London, 1902), Ch. XII, 15-19, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> It appears that Philo of Alexandria (d. 50 CE) was the first to read this story as a triumph of the rational search (viz. Abraham as the prophet-philosopher) over blind faith. See: Knox, Wilfred L., "Abraham and the Quest for God," *The Harvard Theological Review* 28:1 (Jan., 1935), pp. 55-60.

According to another theory, this story is also Ibn Tufayl's (d. 581/1185) inspiration for the famous legend of al-Hayy b. Yaqazān, who, as the fable goes, is raised on an island and attempts to derive true knowledge, isolated from man. This story, in turn, is the basis for the famous Western legend of Robinson Crusoe. See: Jones, Joseph R. "From Abraham to Andrenio: Observations on the Evolution of the Abraham Legend, Its Diffusion in Spain, and Its Relation to the Theme of the Self-Taught Philosopher," *Comparative Literature Studies* 6:1 (1969), pp. 69-101.

al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya regarding the proofs for the existence of God, and whether knowledge of God is one that is innate or rationally acquired. For al-Rāzī, this story establishes a rudimentary version of the Proof of Accidents, and illustrates the legal obligation to search for God (*wujūb al-naẓar*). On the other hand, for Ibn Taymiyya, not only does the story have absolutely nothing to do with proving God's existence, it actually endorses the existence of the *fīṭra*, for Abraham was not actually *searching* for God; rather he already *knew* of His existence, even before Revelation and prophecy.

This incident, therefore, enables us to vividly elucidate the fundamental differences between al-Rāzī and Ibn Taymiyya regarding the role of *'aql* and *fīṭra*, and serves as a pertinent illustration of many of the key theological differences between these two theologians.

### **3.1 Al-Rāzī's Interpretation In Light of Ash'arī Theology**

As is the case with the *Qānūn*, al-Rāzī's understanding of this story did not come out of a vacuum. Although the Proof from Accidents was almost unanimously agreed upon by all the *mutakallimūn*, only a handful of them provided any Qur'ānic basis for it. And the primary Scriptural evidence that was supplied was the story of Abraham and the celestial objects. Ash'arī theologians interpreted the Arabic word *afal* in Abraham's response, "I do not love the *āfilīn*" [Q. 6:77] as signifying 'motion', and hence understood Abraham negating an accident from a body.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest reference I have found to this story having been used in this manner is attributed to the enigmatic 'Jahmī' Bishr al-Mirrīsī (d. 218/833), in the famous refutation of him by 'Uthmān b. Sa'īd al-Dārimī (d. 280/893), entitled *Naqq Ḥajmī b. Sa'īd 'alā al-Mirrīsī al-jahmī al-'anīd fī mā aftara 'alā Allah fī al-tawḥīd*, ed. Manṣūr b. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Simārī (Riyāḍ: Maktaba Adwā al-Salaf, 1999). Al-Dārimī claimed that Bishr denied God's descent to the lower heavens in the last third of the night because of Abraham's statement, "I do not love that which moves". So since Abraham denied 'motion' to God, it was not possible that God is characterized with it. See: *ibid.*, p. 164.

Abū al-Hasan al-Ash‘arī laid the foundations for his later followers when, after quoting Q. 6:76-77, he wrote,<sup>1</sup>

And so (Abraham), may God’s blessings be upon him, combined between the stars and moon in that neither of them could possibly be a god or lord since they both shared the attribute of ‘motion’. And this is the inspection (*nazar*) and proof (*istidlāl*) that rejecters seek to reject and deviants deviate away from.

Al-Ash‘arī sees this Qur’ānic evidence as substantiating the absence of any accidents from a true God, since he sees Abraham as denying the divinity of an object in which accidents (in this case, motion) subsist. He also uses these verses to prove the Ash‘arī doctrine of *wujūb al-nazar*, or the obligation to rationally search for the truth.

Al-Bāqillānī appears to have given this story more prominence, and suggested that this incident is the primary means of proving the existence of the Creator. He writes that Abraham realized these celestial objects could not be God when they “...changed and moved from one state to another,” and hence was led to belief in the true God, the creator of these celestial objects.<sup>2</sup> Both al-Bayhaqī<sup>3</sup> and Al-Juwaynī<sup>1</sup>

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Ibn al-Qayyim writes that his teacher Ibn Taymiyya was greatly enamoured with this book, and would always recommend his students to read it (see: Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ijtima‘ al-juyūsh al-Islāmiyya*, p. 229). Therefore it is highly plausible that Ibn Taymiyya developed his interpretation of this story from al-Dārimī’s writings.

The interpretation of the story of Abaraham as being a proof for the Theory of Accidents is also found amongst the Mu’tazilīs and the Maturīdīs. See, for example: Mahmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, ed. Abd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Lebanon: *Dar Ihyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī*, 1997) vol. 2, p. 39, and Abū Al-Ma‘īn Maymūn b. Muḥammad al-Nasafī, *Bahr al-Kalām* (Cairo: Maṭba‘a al-Kurdī, 1911), pp. 23-24.

<sup>1</sup> *Kitāb al-luma‘ fī al-radd ‘alā ahl al-zaygh wa al-bida‘*, p. 24. He also uses the same verse as evidence in his ‘Treatise of Encouraging Research’; see: R. M. Frank “al-Ash‘arī’s ‘Kitāb al-Ḥathth ‘Alā al-baḥth’”, MIDEO, vol 18 (1988) p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Abū Bakr b. al-Tayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Insāf fī ma yajibu i‘tiqāduhu wa lā yajūz al-jahl bihī*, ed. Imad al-Dīn Ḥaydar (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1986), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> al-Bayhaqī, *al-I‘tiqād wa al-hidāya ilā sabīl al-rashād*, p. 34.

referenced this verse to show that Abraham proved the existence of God by showing that no body in which an accident occurs could be worthy of divinity. The Andalusian Ash'arī al-Qādī 'Iyād (d. 544/1149), in attempting to explain away the theological problem of affirming a prophet of God as having embraced elements of paganism, claimed that this story occurred before Abraham had reached the age of puberty, and hence he was not legally responsible.<sup>2</sup>

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī mentions the story of Abraham in a number of his works. In his *Kitāb al-Muhaṣṣal*, he claims that this Abrahamic story is an evidence for the legitimacy of the Proof of God's Existence from the Createdness of Bodies (*al-istidlāl bi-hudūth al-ajsām*), since Abraham searched for God and proved His existence by examining the temporality of the celestial bodies.<sup>3</sup>

In his work *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*, he uses this story in a more intricate manner. This story, al-Rāzī claims, is one of the primary evidences that proves God cannot have a direction or body, or occupy space. Al-Rāzī states that Abraham proved the createdness of the celestial bodies by the fact that change occurs in them, which eventually led him to turn his face to the true God. He argues that this story proves, in three ways, that God cannot be a body, have a direction or occupy space.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *al-Shāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* ed. 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār (Alexadria, Munshi'a al-Ma'ārif, 1969), p. 246. It is interesting to note that the next Ash'arī of importance, al-Ghazālī, does not, as far as I can tell, understand this story in the manner of his fellow Ash'arīs. Rather, he appears to favor a somewhat Gnostic interpretation of it in his *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, ed. Abū al-'Alā' al-'Afīfī (Cairo: Dār al-Qawmiyyah, 1964) pp. 67-68. This interpretation clearly deserves some attention – I hope to be able to pursue it in a future study.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Qādī 'Iyād, *al-Shifā fī Ḥuqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, ed. Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Nīl (Beirut: Sharika Dār al-Arqam, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 118. He also gives other possibilities, of them is the claim that "...many researchers" have said that Abraham was not searching for the truth but rather attempting to debate with his people in this manner.

<sup>3</sup> al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Muhaṣṣal*, p. 337.

<sup>4</sup> al-Rāzī, *Ta'sīs al-Taqdīs*, pp. 27-28.

Firstly, since all bodies share certain similarities, what is allowed for one body must also be allowed for others. Therefore, if God were a body, He would be characterized with what bodies are characterized with, and accidents could subsist in Him just as they subsist in other bodies. But since Abraham clearly showed that objects that change from one state to another cannot be divine, it follows that God, who is divine, cannot be a body.

Secondly, at the conclusion of this exercise, Abraham said that he turned his face to the One who created the Heavens and Earth (*alladhī fāṭar al-samāwātī wa-l-arḍā*, Q. 6:79), for which God praised him. And the very fact that God praised him at this point shows that all that was required of Abraham was to acknowledge God as the creator, for if God were also a body or substance, and Abraham was required to know this, God would not have praised him until Abraham had reached this knowledge.

Thirdly, if God were a body, this would necessitate that other bodies be similar to Him in His Essence. This, in turn, would imply that He had partners similar to Him. Yet Abraham says, in this series of verses, “...and I am not of those who ascribe partners to Him” [Q. 6:79], thus showing that God does not have a body.

From this, it can be seen that al-Rāzī gave this story more theological prominence than any Ash‘arī prior to him, specifically by using it to negate that God has a body (*jismiyya*), occupies space (*tahayyuz*), or undergoes change (*taghayyur*).

In his *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, al-Rāzī discusses this incident in far greater detail, and, as is characteristic for him in this work, mentions dozens of issues pertaining to it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, v.vol 5, pp. 30-50.

The most central of these issues for this chapter is the question of whether Abraham was sincere in his claim that these celestial objects were actually gods, or was he merely arguing with his people in this manner? According to al-Rāzī, many scholars of exegesis of the past believed that Abraham grew up in a cave, sheltered from society, and that his mother had placed him there and occasionally came to take care of him in order to protect him from the king, who had promised to kill all male babies born in that year due to a vision he had seen. When Abraham came of age, he began questioning his parents and the people around him, ‘Who is my lord?’ and, not being satisfied with their answers, embarked on this journey in which he eventually ‘discovered’ the One true God. According to this interpretation, the story is to be taken as Abraham’s personal journey and quest to discover God. However, al-Rāzī claims, this cannot be the correct opinion, for twelve reasons, which he lists.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, according to al-Rāzī, there are only two possibilities left. The first is that Abraham did not intend to ascribe lordship to these celestial objects, but rather intended something else (and here he lists seven possibilities of what might have been intended and how this phrase can be correctly interpreted; for example, that he was merely stating what his people believed in order to show them the futility of that belief). The second possibility is that this incident occurred before Abraham became an adult (i.e., before puberty), and thus it would not be considered a sin (since before this

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 39-40. One of these twelve mirrors what Ibn Taymiyya will later say: that the claim that these celestial objects are creators is blatant disbelief, and this cannot be presumed of Abraham the ‘Friend of God’.

age one is not held accountable for what one does). This second opinion, states al-Rāzī, is plausible, even though the first one is stronger.<sup>1</sup>

In his *Tafsīr*, al-Rāzī also discussed the precise meaning of the word ‘*ufūl*'.<sup>2</sup> ‘*Ufūl*', he claims, means ‘to disappear after an object has appeared’. And the reason that *ufūl* indicates the createdness of a body is because it indicates motion. Now it is possible that one might question, al-Rāzī states, as to why Abraham had to wait until the objects disappeared before pronouncing their createdness, since the objects would have been moving ever since their appearance? To this, he replies that, while there is no doubt that the rising of these objects and their setting both show that they are created, the fact of the matter is that the evidences that are employed by the prophets must be crystal-clear, such that even the most foolish person can see their validity. And the evidence of the createdness of an object by its motion, whilst completely valid and indubitable, is really only understood by the most honored of God's servants. As for the evidence from their disappearance, this is a matter that all of mankind will be able to comprehend. Hence, in Abraham's wisdom, he used the actual disappearance of the object instead of its motion to prove its createdness.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Rāzī also derives three rulings from Abraham's testimony of ‘*I do not love the āfilīn*' [Q. 6:79]. Firstly, this proves that God cannot be a body (*jism*), since if He were a body, He would also be hidden (*āfil*) from us, and thus not worthy of divinity. Also, this would imply that He cannot descend from the Throne to the skies, otherwise this would

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> As shall be shown in the next section, the interpretation of this one word is the crux of the argument – Ibn Taymiyya strongly objects to the Ash'arī understanding of *ufūl* as ‘moving’.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 43.

be a type of *ufūl* as well. Secondly, this verse clearly proves that created attributes cannot subsist in God, otherwise He would be subject to change. Thirdly, this verse also proves that the religion must be based upon examination, not blind following, otherwise there would be no benefit in Abraham's search and investigation.<sup>1</sup>

As a last point that is relevant to this discussion, al-Rāzī states that this incident is one of the greatest evidences against the *hashawiyya*<sup>2</sup> since Abraham was praised by God for his being guided to the truth through this examination and investigation. This proves, according to al-Rāzī, that there is no station (*maqām*) after that of the prophets which is better than the station of investigation and research;<sup>3</sup> a reference, clearly to the science of *kalām*.

It is interesting to note that in al-Rāzī's discussion of Abraham's story in his *Tafsīr* (and in contrast to some of his other works, such as the *Kitāb al-Muhaṣṣal*), he did not explicitly mention this story as being an evidence for the 'Proof from Accidents'. In this work, therefore, not only does he break ranks with his Ash'arī predecessors, he seems to contradict his other writings on this topic as well, suggesting that Abraham was not actually *searching* for God, but merely arguing with his people. However, in his concluding remarks, he once again affirms that the story is an indication of Abraham's searching for God.

It is important to note here, before proceeding to Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation, that the Ash'arī interpretation relies on two disputed assertions. Firstly, it sees

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<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> A derogatory term used to primarily to designate the *Ahl al-Hadīth*, from *ḥashā* meaning 'to gather everything'. The intention is to state that the *Ahl al-Hadīth* would merely gather every narration and text and jumble it all together, without examination or understanding of what they were gathering.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 50.

Abraham as genuinely searching for the truth as he examines these heavenly lights. In other words, it holds Abraham at his word when he exclaims as he sees each of these three celestial objects, ‘This is my Lord!’ This, as shall be demonstrated, is considered blasphemous by Ibn Taymiyya. Secondly, it understands the Arabic verb ‘*afala*’ to signify motion,<sup>1</sup> which, of course, is taken as the prime example of an accident.

### ***3.2 Ibn Taymiyya’s Interpretation in Light of the Notion of *Fitra****

Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges that a primary evidence<sup>2</sup> that the *mutakallimūn* use to legitimize the ‘Proof of God’s Existence from the Createdness of Accidents’ is the Qur’ānic story of Abraham in Q. 6:74-83.<sup>3</sup> However, Ibn Taymiyya understood these verses in a radically different manner – one which complemented his own interpretations of the human *fitra* and the superfluous cosmological arguments for proving God’s existence. This, of course, put him at odds with the Ash‘arī interpretation, which he severely critiqued in the *Dar’* and other works. Of primary concern to him was the interpretation of *afal*, which, for him, signified disappearance, and not motion. Ibn Taymiyya writes of the *mutakallimūn*,<sup>4</sup>

So they said: any accident that occurs within Him (i.e., God) is *ufūl*, and the Friend of God (i.e., Abraham) said, ‘I do not love the *āfilīn*’, and an ‘*āfil*’ is a being that moves – one in which accidents subside. Thus, the Friend of God (i.e.,

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<sup>1</sup> Although al-Rāzī, in his *Tafsīr*, does mention that *afala* means ‘to disappear’, yet he then says that this is the logical conclusion of an object that moves. Hence he derives ‘motion’ indirectly from the word. See: *ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya is, of course, aware of other Ash‘arī Qur’ānic arguments used by the scholars of *kalām*, but these are more generic in nature, asking man to contemplate his creation (such as Q. 3:190, 51:21, and 88:17-20). The story of Abraham in particular was perceived to be a more precise proof since it is interpreted as Abraham denying the existence of accidents subsiding in God. See: *DT*, vol. 8, pp. 352-3.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmu‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 252.

Abraham) negated his love for any being that is a place for accidents, for such a being cannot be a God.

A critical reading of his writings, in the *Dar'* and in other works, allows us to extrapolate at least eight points through which Ibn Taymiyya criticized the Ash'arī understanding of this story.<sup>1</sup>

**The First Point:** Ibn Taymiyya argues that this story has been entirely misunderstood by the *mutakallimūn*.<sup>2</sup> According to them, when Abraham said to the three celestial bodies, ‘This is my Lord’, Abraham actually meant in his heart that the celestial object was the being that created him.<sup>3</sup> In other words, Abraham was sincerely searching for the Divine Being that created him, and in turn presumed this Being to be a star, then the moon, then the Sun, and finally realized that it was a Divine God that was different from these celestial objects.

However, Ibn Taymiyya asserts Abraham to be a *hanīf*, one who always turned to God, as opposed to an atheist or idol-worshipper searching for the true God. Abraham, following his inborn Divinely-gifted *fītra*, already believed in God and had no need to prove His existence. In order to prove this point, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that God mentions Abraham having been bestowed with guidance (*rushd*) from the very

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<sup>1</sup> The division of these critiques into points was done to simplify the presentation of Ibn Taymiyyah's thoughts, which, as typical, are scattered in more than one work of his. However, at times, he states that this understanding can be refuted ‘...min wujūh: awwaluhā...’ and so forth. See for example: *DT*, vol. 1, pp. 108-130, vol. 1, pp. 312-5, and vol. 8, pp. 355-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-Sunna*, vol. 2, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> As al-Rāzī's quotes above show, Ibn Taymiyya is incorrect in this assessment, as this is not the belief of all the scholars of *kalām*. In fact, not only did Mu'tazilī scholars explicitly deny it, al-Rāzī himself – Ibn Taymiyya's avowed opponent in the *Dar'* – says that this is not the stronger interpretation in his *Tafsīr*. It is true to point out, however, that this is the standard Ash'arite interpretation, and the interpretation that al-Rāzī favored in his *Muhaṣṣal* and other works, as has been mentioned in the previous section.

beginning.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the story was not Abraham's personal search for God, but rather his way of arguing with his people and showing them the futility of their worship of celestial objects. He desired to disgrace his own people by showing them the foolishness of star-worship.

Ibn Taymiyya calls this misunderstanding of the *mutakallimūn* "...the most misguided of all their misguidances".<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, his interpretation seems to mirror that of the Mu'tazilī al-Zamakhsharī, who claimed that Abraham knew his statement was false, but he attempted to show his people that he was not dogmatically inclined, and thus his belief was based on contemplation versus blind conviction.<sup>3</sup> The difference, of course, is that al-Zamakhsharī would have viewed Abraham's conviction as stemming from his rational knowledge, whereas Ibn Taymiyya would view it as stemming from the *fīṭra*.

**The Second Point:** The scholars of *kalām*, according to Ibn Taymiyya, understood the Arabic word 'afal' in Q. 6:79 as meaning 'movement', and this was their justification for taking the story of Abraham as a Qur'ānic evidence for their *dalīl*.

However, Ibn Taymiyya argues, the Arabic word *afala* does not mean 'movement and motion' (*al-ḥaraka wa al-intiqāl*) in the least. In fact, all linguists and grammarians of the Arabic language have agreed that '*afala*' means to disappear and be covered up (*al-ghayb wa al-iḥtijāb*), and not merely to move.<sup>4</sup> Never once did the Arabs use the noun derived from this verb to indicate an object that moved, nor did they call any object

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 8, p. 515. The reference is to Q. 21:51, "And verily, We gave Abraham his guidance from before..."

<sup>2</sup> *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 359.

<sup>3</sup> al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 359, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 252, *DT*, vol. 1, p. 313, and vol. 8, p. 355.

that changed ‘āfil’, for one who walks or prays is not called such, despite his movement or change in posture. Likewise, the Arabs also did not use this word to describe temporary attributes that a body is characterized by, such as sickness or change in color, for one does not say that the Sun *afala* if it becomes yellowish or red, rather they only use this word if it disappears.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya argues that had the meaning of ‘*afala*’ been ‘to move’, Abraham would not have had to wait until the Sun and moon were fully apparent, as the verse states that he waited until after the Sun and moon had become apparent in the horizons (‘fa-lamma ra’ā al-qamara bāzighan...’ and ‘...al-shamsa bāzighatan’ [Q. 7:74,75]). Rather, he could have deduced this *dalīl* from the very first instance the Sun and moon had risen up into the horizon. So the fact that Abraham had to wait until the particular object was fully visible in the sky (*bāzigh*), and then the *ufūl* occurred, shows that it was not by the movement of the objects but rather by their disappearance that Abraham claimed these beings could not be the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

**The Third Point:** To believe that Abraham actually intended that the star, moon and Sun was his Lord when he said ‘This is my Lord’ is actually an evidence *against* the *kalām* cosmological proof, and not for it. For Abraham saw the star rise and set, and likewise the moon and Sun, and they continued to move throughout this, rising and setting. Yet never once while witnessing this motion did Abraham deny divinity to

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Bughyat al-Murtād*, p. 360, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 253, DT, vol. 8, p. 356.

It is to be noted that al-Rāzī, in his *Tafsīr*, is fully aware of the meaning of *afala* as ‘disappearing’, and also pre-empts the problem that Ibn Taymiyya mentions here and in his next point. He claims that while Abraham himself understood motion as the factor that negated divinity to these objects, such complex proofs would not be understood by the masses, and so instead he used the issue of disappearance, which would be easier to understand, as an indication for an accident. See: al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, p. 43.

these celestial objects. Rather, he waited until they manifested themselves and then eventually disappeared entirely before making this claim. Thus, according to the interpretation of the *mutakallimūn*, Abraham tacitly allowed these beings the attribute of divinity despite their motion, showing that motion in and of itself does not disqualify an object from being divine.<sup>1</sup> Rather, Abraham did not concern himself with the accidents of these celestial objects to disprove their being gods; instead he used the fact that they disappeared and were not permanent for this claim.<sup>2</sup> So the story of Abraham is closer to being an evidence *against* the *dalīl* rather than being one in support of it.<sup>3</sup>

In Ibn Taymiyya's view, this is yet another example of a maxim that he frequently quotes: there is no textual evidence that the people of deviation (*ahl al-bid'a*) use to try to justify their deviation except that that very text can be used against them rather than for them.<sup>4</sup>

**The Fourth Point:** Even if, for arguments sake, one were to allow the *mutakallimūn* their claim that this story proves one premise for the 'Proof from Accidents', namely, that Abraham witnessed an accident subsisting in these celestial objects and hence negated its divine nature, this does not validate the many other premises that are required for this Proof. Nowhere in the Scripture, Ibn Taymiyya stresses, can one derive that motion can only occur in a created object, or that every moving object is by necessity of possible existence. Thus, if this Proof requires multiple

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 313. As has been mentioned in the previous footnote, al-Rāzī has an explanation for this.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Halīm b. Taymiyyah, *Sharḥ al-Isbahāniyyah*, unpublished doctoral dissertation edited by Muḥammad al-Şā'wī (Riyāḍ: Imam Muḥammad b. Şā'ūd University, 1408 A.H.), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 111 and vol. 8, p. 356.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 254.

premises, and the Qur'ān only mentions one, then in reality it has not mentioned this Proof.<sup>1</sup>

**The Fifth Point:** According to Ibn Taymiyya, the people whom Abraham was addressing already believed in a Supreme Lord. There was no need, therefore, to prove His existence.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the people of Egypt at the time of Moses, who affirmed Pharaoh's claim of being the Lord, the people of Abraham were polytheists who worshipped celestial objects, but acknowledged the One God to be Supreme. In fact, these people did not even believe these celestial objects to be the Creator, and that was why Abraham pointed out to them that if the star, moon and Sun were not Lords (*rabb*), then why should they be worshipped?

The fact that the people of Abraham acknowledged God is proven in the Qur'ān; Ibn Taymiyya quotes Q. 26:75-77, when Abraham says to his people: “*Do you see that which you all worship? You and your forefathers of old? Then they are all hated to me, except for the Lord of the worlds.*” And again in Q. 43:26-27, “*I have dissociated with all whom you worship, except for the One who created me, for He will guide me.*” In both these verses, Abraham mentions that his people believed in the Supreme God and worshipped Him, hence he had to make an exception in his dissociation and hatred. And it was because of this fact that he said, at the conclusion of his conversation with his people in these very verses under discussion, “*And I am not of those who associate partners (to God)*” [Q. 6: 78].

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol. 1, pp. 118-20.

<sup>2</sup> DT, vol. 8, p. 356.

Therefore, his people, like other pagan cultures, believed in God but worshipped objects besides Him, in this case celestial objects, building temples in their honor.<sup>1</sup>

So the point of the story, according to Ibn Taymiyya, could not have been to prove the existence of God, since his people already believed in God, but rather to prove that only He was worthy of worship, and not these celestial objects.<sup>2</sup>

**The Sixth Point:** It is well-known, Ibn Taymiyya argues, that not a single intelligent person in the history of mankind has ever claimed that one star was exclusively responsible for the creation of all other stars, the Sun, moon and the rest of the creation.<sup>3</sup> In fact, even the people of Abraham did not state this, so how could this be assumed of Abraham, the prophet of God?<sup>4</sup> Clearly, therefore, Abraham was using this as a point of debate against his people.

**The Seventh Point:** Abraham only denied his love of an object that disappears (*viz. āfil*), for he said after viewing these objects, “*I do not love that which disappears*” [Q. 6:76]. He did not mention anything other than denying that he loved such objects.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the elaborate conclusions that the *mutakallimūn* derive from this story are not explicit in it.

**The Eighth Point:** Ibn Taymiyya argues that this understanding of the verse has not been narrated from any of the pious predecessors, or from the scholars of exegesis

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<sup>1</sup> DT, vol.1, p. 110, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 254.

<sup>2</sup> *Sharḥ al-Isbahāniyyah*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 360.

<sup>4</sup> *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 6, p. 254.

<sup>5</sup> *Bughya al-Murtād*, p. 360.

or from the scholars of the language. Rather, this is an innovated interpretation that earlier scholars, such as al-Dārimī, clearly pointed out and refuted.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *DT*, vol. 1, p. 314. Al-Dārimī's quote has already preceded.

#### **4. An Overview of Ibn Taymiyya's Notion of *Fitra***

Now that we have discussed Ibn Taymiyya's views on the human *fitra* and illustrated some of the primary corollaries that result from it, a brief synopsis is called for.

In order to effectively reclaim orthodox Sunnism from his Ash'arī counterparts, Ibn Taymiyya needed to provide an alternative to the rationalist-based approach of the *mutakallimūn*, one that would appeal to both textual and rational sources.

For Ibn Taymiyya, there was no need to appeal to what he considered the innovated neo-Platonic based science of *kalām* to prove God's existence, and thence to substantiate religious texts. After all, if one did indeed need to ratify God's existence via *kalām* proofs, it would make sense to validate each and every one of God's injunctions, and even Divine Attributes, through a similar rational process. And this, for the textualist *salafī*, was simply unacceptable.

Yet the question remained: how was one to prove the veracity of the faith while remaining loyal to it? What was needed was a universally accessible, intuitive, inborn, non-rational-based source of validation: a source that was bestowed by God Himself, universally, to each and every breathing soul, that would be at par with Divine Revelation. This source would be distinct from reason and Scripture, and could serve to validate the veracity of the Scripture and correct the excesses of reason without rejecting either belief in Scripture or sound reason. It would have to allow one to believe in one's faith without first having to reject it. It would also be independent of the level of one's intellectual aptitude, for if the religion of God were to be truly

accessible to all of mankind, then it must appeal equally to the laymen as much as to erudite scholars. The knowledge that this source should convey must be necessary, immediate, efficacious, indubitable and completely compatible with man's other faculties and with God's speech.

For Ibn Taymiyya, the texts of the Qur'ān and Sunna provided just such a source: namely, the *fitra*. The *fitra* was a psycho-spiritual human faculty that bestowed on man the inherent belief in an all-powerful and all-perfect Divine Being. Along with this knowledge, it empowered man to go beyond his base desires and propelled him to aspire to more noble and dignified causes, such as worshiping God and loving Him. The *fitra* blessed man with morality, and affirmed he was naturally inclined towards the truth and towards noble virtues. As well, the *fitra* was a cognitive faculty, able to recognize the truth of any prophetic message, and receive the light of God's Revelation, just as a healthy eye recognizes the bright light of the Sun. And a pure *fitra* would naturally incline towards such a message and accept it, recognizing it as being from its Creator.

For Ibn Taymiyya, this *fitra* is what God references when He tells us that the Children of Adam have been given a Covenant, a *mīthāq*, so powerful and strong in its message, that it was as if they might as well have verbally testified in God's presence that He, and He alone, is the true Lord and the only Being worthy of worship. The prophets of God, even before Revelation descended on them, accepted this knowledge conferred upon them from the *fitra*, and this explains their pure character and impeccable mannerisms.

Therefore, for Ibn Taymiyya, the first obligation upon the one who comes of legal age is to submit to the One whom he already knows is His Creator, and to worship Him wholeheartedly. There is no need for convoluted and superfluous proofs to prove His Existence – after all, does the Sun require any evidence for its light? Any who is so foolish as to deny the Sun is in fact testifying that his own faculty to recognize it is at fault; for Ibn Taymiyya, it is his own *fitra* that an atheist negates, not the existence of God.

A perfect illustration for the differences in the two theological views of Ibn Taymiyya and al-Rāzī is demonstrated by how they interpreted the Qur'ānic story of Abraham's viewing of celestial objects. The Ash'arīs, believing that a rational inquiry that proved the existence of God, and then the veracity of the texts, was the sole way to achieve indubitable faith, read the Qur'ānic story as evidence for the legitimacy of such an inquiry, and in particular through the proof of the existence of God from the createdness of accidents. Some of them, such as al-Bāqillānī, claimed that Abraham was actually searching for God, and through this search rejected the stars, moon and Sun as gods due to the existence of an accident, in this case movement, within them. Others, such as al-Rāzī, understood from this incident that Abraham was arguing with his people and trying to convince them of the existence of God by showing that celestial objects could not be divine because of their motion. In all cases, these Ash'arī authorities made an underlying assumption of the requirement to rationally search for God, and that the createdness of accidents demonstrated His existence.

Based on his notion of *fitra*, Ibn Taymiyya found it inconceivable to allow the great patriarch Abraham to ever have been ignorant of God, much less 'discover' Him

via the Proof from Accidents. Taking his cue from earlier traditionalist scholars such as al-Dārimī, he viewed the story of Abraham as narrating Abraham's argumentation with his people, while knowing full well that God and God alone was the only being worthy of worship. If anything, the Qur'ānic story proved for Ibn Taymiyya the efficacy of the *fitra*, for, without yet being inspired by God, Abraham knew full well of His Existence and His right to be worshipped.

In responding to Ash'arī criticisms, it appears that Ibn Taymiyya was not aware of al-Rāzī's specific interpretations of this incident, for although he addresses some of al-Rāzī's points which are common to earlier Ash'arīs, he evades tackling points that are unique to him, and even accuses al-Rāzī of interpretations that al-Rāzī did not hold. This is clearly an oversight on Ibn Taymiyya's part.

Lastly, it must be pointed out that there is a fundamental circularity in Ibn Taymiyya's argument – one that he does not address nor even reference in passing. It may well be asked by one who rejects Islam, or even just the concept of the *fitra*: What evidence is there of the existence of this ingrained knowledge, and how does anyone actually know what it says? What if someone were to claim that his '*fitra*' – if it exists – tells him that there is no God, or that idolatry is morally permitted?

According to Ibn Taymiyya, the only way to verify what is the 'correct' *fitra* is through its conformity with the message of the prophets, and through its agreement with correct reason. And yet, one of the primary functions of the *fitra* is to verify that a prophet is indeed a true prophet, and that an intellectual argument is a valid rational one. Hence, the sound *fitra* conforms to the message of a true prophet, and a true prophet is recognized when his message conforms to the sound *fitra*. And the sound

*fitra* is in agreement with correct reason, yet correct reason is decided by a pure *fitra*. The tripartite division of these three epistemological truths, all working in perfect harmony, only succeeds if one actually believes in this inter-harmonious relationship. Ultimately, there is no independent external proof that validates any one of them, other than the claim that each one must be in agreement with the other two.

The circularity of the argument is inevitable, and perhaps because it is impossible to avoid or explain away, Ibn Taymiyya does not even attempt at a solution.

# CONCLUSION

Ibn Taymiyya witnessed a particularly schismatic period of Islamic history, wherein numerous factions were laying claim to authoritative Islam. Included in this diverse milieu were Ṣūfī groups who claimed an esoteric knowledge divinely received through the medium of *kashf*; the *falāsifa*, who were resurrecting Hellenistic thought, clothing it in Islamic terminology; the scholars of *kalām* who had, *mutatis mutandis*, absorbed neo-Platonic concepts from the teachings of the Church Fathers; and the numerous Shī‘ī factions, each of which interpreted the concept of *imāma* in its own way.

In Ibn Taymiyya’s views, however, there was one particular factor that united all of these disparate groups, namely: they were the syncretic product of an unholy union between God’s Revelation and an external, alien, imperfect source of knowledge. From his perspective, none of them took exclusively from the Sacred Texts, all of them distorted the Sacred Texts to conform to foreign ideas, and none of them wished to espouse the ideal of the first three generations of Islam, the noble *salaf*. In fact, the only theological group justifiably laying claim to espousing the methodology of the *Salaf* were the classical *Ahl al-Hadīth* and the later Ḥanbalī theological school that preserved its heritage. As far as Ibn Taymiyya was concerned, only this represented Orthodox Sunnī Islam: no other theology deserved the designation of *Ahl al-Sunna*, much less an acknowledgement of legitimacy.

Ibn Taymiyya felt compelled to defend his conservative and scripturally rooted interpretation of Islam, and his writings evince an indefatigable perseverance in refuting every alternative belief system. Regardless how numerous the opponents to Orthodox Sunnism were, no matter how many interlocutors he challenged, no matter how high the odds against him seemed to be stacked, he never lost hope in defending

the purity of his creed from the onslaught of all its challengers. Feeling that truth was on his side, he seemed to possess an almost inexhaustible supply of energy (and ink), and devoted a considerable portion of his life writing scholarly theological monographs, treatises and *fatwas*.

It would be true to say that Ibn Taymiyya was particularly lacking in sympathy when it came to the claims of the Shī'īs and the *falāsifa* (even more so when these elements were combined in any figure or group, as they were in the case of Ibn Sīnā or the Ismā'īlīs), and some of his harshest rebukes are reserved for them. Yet, it is the Ash'arī school that is awarded the dubious honor of being the primary focus of his theological writings. While Ibn Taymiyya does not himself justify why this is the case (after all, one could argue that the Ash'arīs were in fact the closest school to 'Orthodox Sunnī Islam', a fact Ibn Taymiyya himself acknowledged,<sup>1</sup> and therefore the least necessary to refute), it is quite clear that because the threat of contaminating Orthodoxy was the greatest from the Ash'arīs, Ibn Taymiyya focused on them the most. He felt that the Sunnī laity was, by and large, protected against the convoluted concepts of the *falāsifa*, and neither did he perceive an imminent threat of mass conversion to Shī'ism. Ash'arism, on the other hand, was in a unique position, for the two centuries immediately preceding Ibn Taymiyya witnessed a remarkable transformation of the Ash'arī school from being what was a marginal, discarded Persian theological school, to representing dominant Sunnī theology in all the major Arab and

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taymiyya is, of course, no relativist. He posits that some groups are closer to the truth than others, and in this context he typically praises the Ash'arī school as being the closest to the *Ahl al-Hadīth*. He writes, "It can be said that Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī is closer to clear reason than the Mu'tazilīs." See: *DT*, vol. 7, p. 238. In fact, in one oft-cited passage, he writes that the Ash'arīs can be considered Sunnī Muslims when one views them in context of the larger picture, meaning vis-à-vis the Shī'ī and Mu'tazilī schools. See: *Bayān talbīs*, vol. 2, p. 87; and also: *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 8, p. 230; *DT*, vol. 5, p. 36 and vol. 6, p. 292.

Muslim cities. This insidiousness of Ash‘arī theology, guised as it was under the same rubric of the Sunnism that Ibn Taymiyya sought to protect and defend, was simply too much for the champion of Ḥanbalism to ignore.

It is very likely that Ibn Taymiyya did not realize that the rise of Ash‘arism had more to do with Nizām al-Mulk’s educational policies and *madrasas* than with its theological appeal to the masses. It is also possible that Ibn Taymiyya was motivated in his efforts by the clear evolution of Ash‘arī thought as it continued to move away from the theology of the *Ahl al-Hadīth* and absorbed more and more concepts from *falsafa*. Regardless of the precise nature of the motivation, Ibn Taymiyya recognized a dire need to suspend the onslaught of this competitor to Orthodox Sunnism. In order to do this, he identified a worthy interlocutor to engage with: the greatest theologian Ash‘arism had seen, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, whose writings were widely read.

While Ibn Taymiyya was perturbed by many theological positions held by the Ash‘arī school (in particular, the issue of the Divine Attributes), and thus wrote a number of works vindicating Ḥanbalī theology against Ash‘arī thought, he was aware of the urgency in identifying the root of the problem between these two competing strands of Sunnī Islam. In his analysis, the fundamental issue dividing the *Ahl al-Hadīth* from Ash‘arism was the Ash‘arī obligation to rationally prove (principally through the *kalām* cosmological proofs) the validity of Revelation before believing in it, and the corollaries that resulted from this premise.

Ash‘arī logic was fairly straightforward: blind, uncritical, faith was not an acceptable faith. Without a critical and independent intellectual examination of one’s beliefs, every believer’s truth-claim regarding his own faith amounted to the same

value. Surely Islam could not be taken as the truth merely because one had the good fortune of having been born into a Muslim family? In order to extricate themselves from this conundrum, Ash‘arī theologians argued for ‘reasoned faith’: the obligation of each individual of legal age to rationally prove Islam before believing in it. This was achieved via a straightforward process. Firstly, one must prove (via the *kalām* cosmological proofs) that a god exists and that He is One. Secondly, one needed to prove that God sends prophets and grants them miracles, and subject the claims of those who proclaim their prophethood to this analysis. Lastly, one needs to acknowledge and realize that Muḥammad was in fact a true prophet sent with divine miracles, and consequently submit to him and to the Book that he claimed was from God.

Al-Rāzī systematically developed this paradigm and offered (with unacknowledged help from the writings of al-Ghazālī) a framework to legitimize and justify these Ash‘arī doctrines. Since it was the human intellect that allowed one to believe in the Qur’ān as the word of God, thus making it a necessary antecedent and logical precursor to faith, al-Rāzī argued that the intellect should continue to be the overriding force through which the Qur’ān is understood. Since the intellect affirms the truth of the Qur’ān, it shall also be assigned the primary role in interpreting its meanings. For al-Rāzī, the intellect validates the Qur’ān in any and all circumstances. Therefore, if the Qur’ān appeared to prescribe any doctrine that imputed the intellect, to accept as valid an illogical claim stemming from the Qur’ān would impugn the very intellect that validated the Qur’ān in the first place! Hence, the only acceptable alternative, as al-Rāzī articulated in his *Qānūn*, was to understand such problematic

verses in light of what the intellect demands. Al-Rāzī applied the *Qānūn* liberally to the texts of the Qur’ān, and in particular those texts pertaining to God’s Attributes.

Ibn Taymiyya strongly disagreed with the entire Ash‘arī paradigm. It was blasphemous, he claimed, to consider the human intellect superior to God’s Speech. God’s Speech did not need and should not require validation from *any* other source – much less a created and inferior one like the intellect. In Ibn Taymiyya’s mind the intellect was *not* a necessary antecedent required to validate the truth of the Qur’ān. There was another human faculty, one that the Ash‘arī theologians neglected, that performed this vital role in a far more pristine manner: the *fīṭra*.

Additionally, the claim that intellectual proofs must ultimately overrule the Qur’ānic message (as formulated in al-Rāzī’s *Qānūn*) was, for Ibn Taymiyya, the essence of heresy. Throughout the *Dar’*, he subjected al-Rāzī’s *Qānūn* to an onslaught from every conceivable angle and with every weapon in his arsenal. The *Qānūn*, he argued, is illogical. It is contradictory. It is based on flawed premises. It leads to sacrilegious conclusions. It opens the doors for heretics to destroy the faith. It renders the entire notion of prophecy, and of Divine Revelation, superfluous. It defies the reality of faith in God. It opposes true submission to the message of the Prophet. It belies the Qur’ān’s descriptions of itself. It falsely presupposes that intellect is one indivisible, precisely defined and infallible entity. And the criticisms go on and on.

What is particularly pertinent here is that Ibn Taymiyya used just as many faith-based arguments to assail the *Qānūn* as he did rational ones. In other words, he did not merely appeal to faith in order to justify his claims: he was forced to argue, *rationally*, that it was irrational to treat rationality with the sacredness that the *mutakallimūn* do.

As Arberry writes, "...and that arch-enemy of the philosophers, Ibn Taymiyya, displays in his polemical broadsides a superb mastery of the methods of dialectical reasoning."<sup>1</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya proved himself more of an apologist for the rationality of his own tradition than a polemicist against the use of rationality.

The matter was a clear one for Ibn Taymiyya: according to him God revealed Books and sent Messengers in order to communicate His message to mankind. Claiming that this revealed Scripture was too convoluted to understand, or that the statements of the Messenger required excessive conditions before they could be accepted, belied the very rationale of God's communication. He cited numerous Qur'ānic evidences to this purpose: the Qur'ān describes itself as being an intelligible book, revealed in explicit language, communicated in plain Arabic, meant to be contemplated by all, a light for humanity, and full of wisdom. What the *mutakallimūn* posited made the Qur'ān, for Ibn Taymiyya at least, into an intricate puzzle, more akin to book of riddles than a '*...clear guidance for mankind*' [Q. 2:185].

Ibn Taymiyya's criticisms against the *mutakallimūn* were relentless. What 'intellect' are they referring to, he questioned, when each group of *kalām*, nay, even adherents of the same theological group, differed regarding what is and what is not sound intellect? Also, was not the term 'intellect', and all of the neologisms they invented (such as '*arad* and *jawhar* and *jism*) mere expressions, cloaked with whatever legitimacy and meaning the *mutakallimūn* wished to give it? And why was it, he argued, that the *mutakallimūn* found fault with the *falāsifa*, and at times even considered them to be irreligious heretics, when the *falāsifa* employed the very same techniques and

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<sup>1</sup> Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam*, p. 18.

methodology as the *mutakallimūn*, except that they were exercised on different texts of the Qur’ān?

Ibn Taymiyya’s attempt to demolish the *Qānūn* appears to have made some impact. Although references to a refutation or two having been written are mentioned, no work has survived from the camp of his interlocutors that was able to rebuild and fortify the Ash‘arī *Qānūn* in the aftermath of Ibn Taymiyya’s attacks. Perhaps this and other of his writings also played a role in curtailing what had previously been the unchecked progression of Ash‘arī thought.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, above and beyond this detailed challenge against the *Qānūn*, there was one crucial element outstanding to effectively deal it its final blow. In order to correctly undermine and challenge the sanctity the *mutakallimūn* ascribed to the intellect, Ibn Taymiyya recognized an alternative substitute was required. He realized that the ‘reasoned faith’ claim of the Ash‘arīs was logical. After all, if one validated the truth of one’s faith via blind faith, then each faith tradition could make the same claim of itself, and the universal truth of Islam could not be proven. But, if one followed the Ash‘arī methodology of asking every person of legally accountable age to critically examine the Divine Book before accepting it, then it would also be logical to extend the same courtesy to each and every aspect that the Book required one to believe in. Once the sanctity and superiority of the ‘*aql* over *naql* had been established, it could not be taken

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware this is an uncontested thesis; I suggest below that this should be the topic of another research. One thing is clear, however: Ash‘arī thought does appear, for all intents and purposes, to stagnate and ossify after the 8<sup>th</sup> AH/ 13<sup>th</sup> CE century, especially when one compares the rate of post-Ibn Taymiyyan progression with that of pre-Ibn Taymiyyan progression. To be able to conclude with certainty whether or not Ibn Taymiyya directly influenced this is a matter that requires further research.

away. In other words, once the ‘*aql* had been made an antecedent to legitimize *naql*, it would always remain the uncontested precedent in understanding it.

In order to extricate himself from this clear predicament, Ibn Taymiyya had to propose an alternative, feasible, means to validate the text of the Qur’ān. He found just such a source in the Islamic notion of *fitra*. While the notion of *fitra* had been rudimentarily commented on by earlier Ḥanbalī theologians (most notably by the Andalusian Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr), Ibn Taymiyya unraveled this notion and meticulously constructed an unprecedented human faculty out of it. Ibn Taymiyya posited that it is the *fitra* that makes man what he is, and raises him above base and animalistic instincts by imbuing in him noble desires and a yearning for God-consciousness. This divinely-ingrained faculty works in tandem with other human faculties, most importantly with the intellect, acting as a verifying agent to both the legitimacy of Divine Texts and the soundness of human reason. The *fitra* also endows man with a sense of morality, and causes him to choose benefit over harm, and truth over falsehood. Most importantly, the *fitra* needs nourishment, and this nourishment is attained in everything that is godly. Scripture nourishes the *fitra*; loving God nourishes the *fitra*; doing good works nourishes the *fitra*, and so forth. Conversely, everything that distances man from God corrupts the *fitra* and harms it.

For Ibn Taymiyya, it was the *fitra* that intuitively recognized God’s truth, as clearly as the eye recognizes the brightness of the Sun. The veracity of God’s revelation was, therefore, in no need of intellectual validation, having already been validated by a supra-rational, divinely implanted, ingrained source. One of the primary differences between the *fitra* and rational thought was that the *fitra* constitutes necessary

knowledge, as opposed to an acquired one, hence there was no need to ‘step out of Islam’, as it were, to judge its truth from a neutral platform. Rather, the *fitra* acts as an inbuilt compass, guiding each and every man to knowledge of the ultimate truth of God’s Revelation without even needing to know *how* he knew it to be true.

There remained, however, some inconsistencies with Ibn Taymiyya’s explanations. On occasion, he confirmed his own fallibility, and demonstrated that perhaps it is truly impossible to live up to the ideal of a complete, unquestioning submission to the Sacred Texts. In the issue of the Adamic Covenant, he clearly favored *kalām* techniques and adopted the opinion of his opponents, even as he discarded the opinion of his own theological school, in order to substantiate the legitimacy of the *fitra*. There is no doubt that further research will uncover more such examples.

Also, Ibn Taymiyya never points out that fundamentally he and al-Rāzī are arguing for the same principle: neither wishes to posit a real conflict between reason and Revelation. The very *motive* that causes al-Rāzī to derive with the *Qānūn* is because he wishes to protect the Qur’ān from the accusation of it being irrational. The devil, of course, was in the details as each one of them attempted to work out a congruous relationship between ‘*aql* and *naql*.

But such paltry trivialities aside, what Ibn Taymiyya proposed as his ultimate solution was nothing short of staggering. He envisioned a tripartite division of checks and balances: an intricate relationship between Divine Revelation, the human intellect, and the psycho-spiritual *fitra*. Ideally, these three components work in complete harmony with each other, and a corruption of any one of these should be corrected by either or both of the others.

Each component of this triad scheme has its role and function. The Qur'ān, being for Ibn Taymiyya God's uncreated Divine Speech, is the purest and most blessed. However, the Qur'ān is not available to all of humanity, for many amongst mankind have never heard it. Moreover, it is also open to misunderstanding if one has a diseased heart (as per Q. 3:7). Additionally, the Ash'arī claim that blind faith is not 'legitimate faith' has an element of truth to it, for no doubt the believer has to substantiate his belief in the Qur'ān via *some* mechanism.

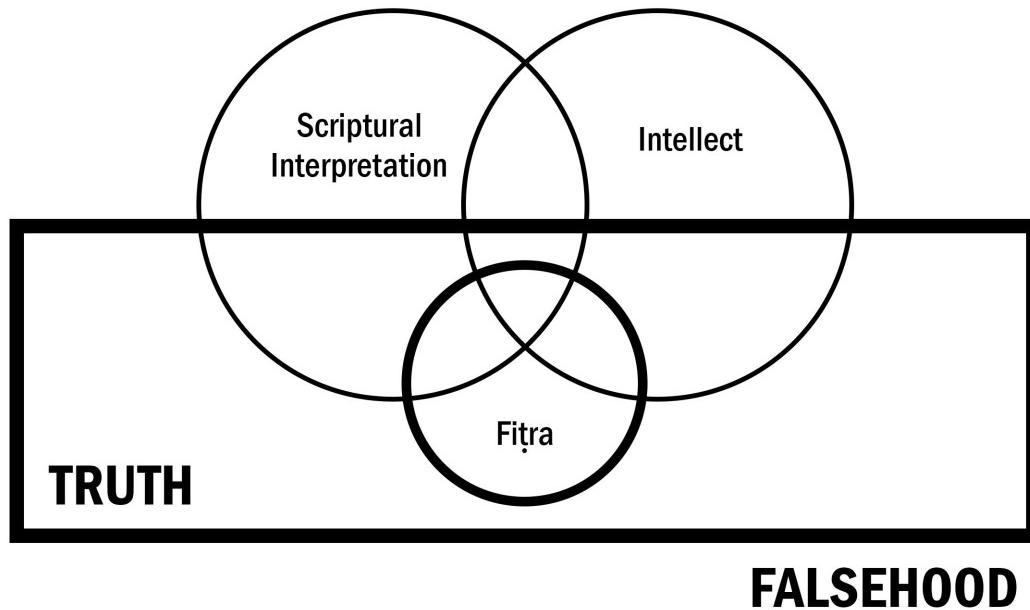
This mechanism cannot, however, solely be the intellect. The intellect, for Ibn Taymiyya, was the weakest link of the triad. Like all human faculties, it was limited in its scope and function. Within the scope that it was created for, the intellect could do wonders; after all, was it not the intellect that made man more than a mere animal? Unlike his other faculties, however, man regularly attempted to extrapolate the scope of the intellect to areas where it was never destined to operate. Hence, to independently prove what was correct or incorrect reason was problematic. Since there was no universally agreed upon criterion for what constituted 'correct reason', and since people's intellects differed in both acuteness and analysis, whose intellect could be taken as the final judge between all other intellects?

This is where the *fitra* came into play, being the single most efficacious of these tripartite components – one rooted into the very psyche of humanity. The *fitra*, for Ibn Taymiyya, acts as an anchor, instinctively informing man in specific areas (such as God and His Attributes) what was correct intellect and what was incorrect. Additionally, since the *fitra* exists in man before his exposure to the Qur'ān, it was what first validated the Qur'ān, before eventually being absorbed by it and completely consumed

into it. Once a believer, through his *fitra*, believed in the Qur'ān, it was the Qur'ān that reigned supreme, not because the *fitra* was effaced, but because the Qur'ān appropriated the *fitra*: everything the *fitra* had, the Qur'ān contained, and infinitely more as well.

For Ibn Taymiyya, all those who rejected the explicit text of the Qur'ān needed to resort to fanciful, rational hermeneutics; and thus, both their understanding of the Scripture, and their rational proofs, must be false. Yet, those amongst them who retained a pure *fitra* would know this. And Ibn Taymiyya considered even a corrupted *fitra* as still retaining some of its truth.

The following diagram illustrates this scenario:



**Diagram One: Ibn Taymiyya's conception of the *kalām* paradigm**

Ibn Taymiyya argued that the practitioners of *kalām* were in doubt (*shakk*) and confusion (*hiyara*) because their *fitra* did not situate their understandings of the Qur'ān or their intellect as being wholly reasonable. Elements of the interpretation of the Scripture, along with the false intellectual methods that they employed, had to be outside of the realm of ultimate truth. If these practitioners were sincere, they would have no alternative other than to succumb to the efficacious pull of the *fitra*, and reconcile both their understanding of the texts (or, if they were non-Muslim, their choice of Divine Text) and their understanding of reason, so as to eventually conform with this divinely-implanted knowledge.

This perfect state of conformity is demonstrated by the following schematic diagram:

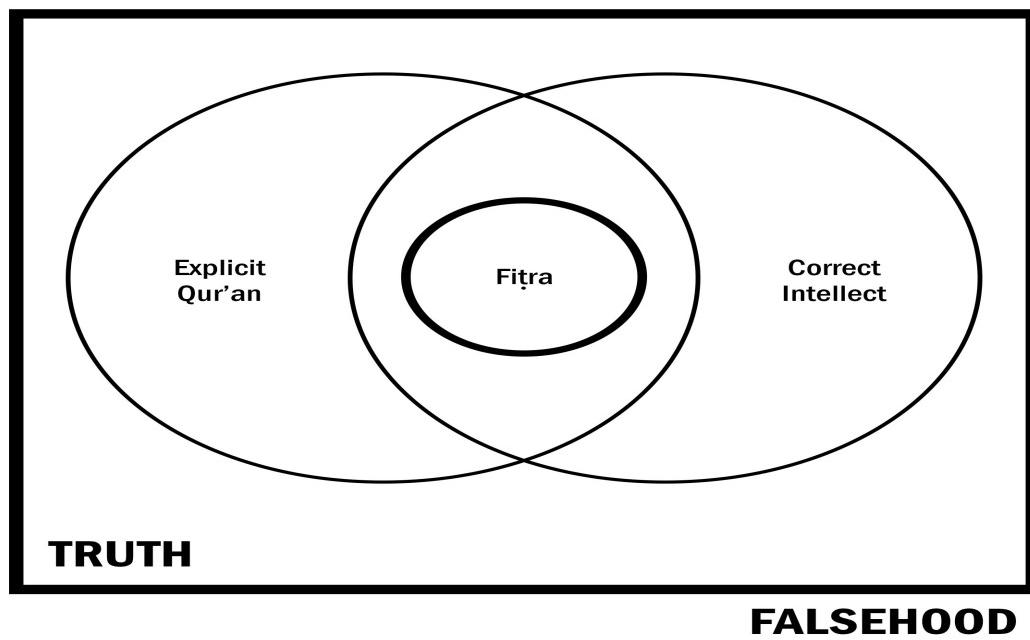


Diagram Two: The Taymiyyan Ideal

In Diagram Two, we see how Ibn Taymiyya posited the *fitra* as a pivotal, anchoring force that situates both explicit Scripture and sound intellect. Everything that an uncorrupted *fitra* affirms is affirmed *both* by the Qur'ān and sound intellect. Examples of this include: the existence of God; His primary Attributes, such as Omniscience and Power; His transcendent nature above the creation; human morality; and other matters. And the text of the Qur'ān, when exposed to the pure *fitra*, will appropriate it in such a way as to confirm and validate it, until eventually the *fitra* is consumed by it. After all, argued Ibn Taymiyya, the Qur'ān was revealed to nourish and foster the *fitra*. The combination of Qur'ān-cum-*fitra* would then be able to situate what is sound and correct intellect.

Correct intellect, of course, was always within the realm of truth for Ibn Taymiyya (along with the clear meanings derived from the Qur'ān and authentic ḥadīth). The Qur'ān informs of matters that the intellect cannot derive (such as the detailed pleasures and punishments of Heaven and Hell); likewise correct intellect also informs of matters that are not present in the Qur'ān (such as the details of the physical sciences). But in no circumstance will the two be in actual conflict with one another, and the information yielded by both shall remain within the realm of truth.

This ‘Taymiyyan ideal’ is what Orthodox Sunnī Islam called for: the perfect synchronization between Scripture, intellect and *fitra*, all three supporting and overlapping with each other.

One can posit other scenarios as well (*not illustrated*). For example, when the *fitra* itself is corrupted, the primary means of rectifying it would be the pull of Scripture on

the *fīṭra* until it returns to the circle of ultimate truth. And in exceedingly rare cases, true intellect could potentially also correct a corrupted *fīṭra*.

We are only beginning to fully understand the intellectual heritage of Ibn Taymiyya, a task that requires much future work and research. This dissertation has shed light on some hitherto understudied areas. In particular: (i) it explains the primary factors that led to the Ash‘arī school’s prominence prior to the era of Ibn Taymiyya; (ii) it summarizes the *Dar’* in an accessible manner, and analyzes the chief methodologies that Ibn Taymiyya utilizes in refuting al-Rāzī’s *Qānūn*; and, most importantly, (iii) it engages in a thorough study of the epistemological and psychological role of *fīṭra* as understood by Ibn Taymiyya.

During the course of my writing, the paucity of research in a number of important areas of Islamic theology became manifest. I believe the following issues in particular are worthy of further research:

- The intellectual development of Ash‘arī theology in the first three hundred years of its existence, and the various strands that developed within it (with an emphasis on the extinct strands represented by figures such as al-Bayhaqī).
- The mechanisms through which Ash‘arism came to be intrinsically linked to *taṣawwuf*, and the theological influence of each upon the other, both pre- and post-Ghazālī.
- The effects (if any) of Ibn Taymiyya’s writings upon the development of Ash‘arī theology post-Rāzī.

- Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of God's Nature and Divine Attributes, and how he attempted to evade charges of anthropomorphism while affirming the literal text of the Scripture.

Even if one fundamentally disagrees with Ibn Taymiyya, it is difficult not to admire a man who defended, so passionately, persistently and perspicuously, the truth that he believed in. Clearly, Ibn Taymiyya's vision of supporting the explicit texts of Revelation, and dismissing both esoteric-based *Šūfī* and rational-based *kalām* reinterpretations of the Sacred Texts, struck a sympathetic chord amongst many Muslims.

The significance of Ibn Taymiyya's contribution, and the resounding popularity that he enjoyed and continues to enjoy, is due in large part to the fact that he managed to salvage, in the eyes of his followers at least, both the integrity of the Revealed scripture and the efficacy of the intellect. By proposing a robust and dynamic relationship between Scripture and reason, mediated through the inborn faculty of *fitrā*, he managed to safeguard for his followers the image of a divine and infallible Revelation harmonious with a created and fallible, yet still venerated, human intellect. Just as man was a noble creature, and God transcendent over him, so too is the human intellect an admirable faculty, but nonetheless subservient to God's Revelation. The creation was in harmony with itself, and achieved its full potential, only when it submitted to God and venerated Him. And so too, the intellect was in harmony with all other human faculties, and reached its full potential, when it acknowledged the ultimate veracity of knowledge from God and held His Speech as sacred and infallible.

And this, for Ibn Taymiyya, was not only what the religion taught, it was what reason itself demanded.

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